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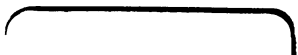
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N A N;

THE NEW-FASHIONED GIRL

BY

MRS. S. C. HALLOWELL

AUTHOR OF "MRS. BENTLEY"



NAN, THE NEW-FASHIONED GIRL.

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THE NEW-FASHIONED GIRL.

BY
MRS. S. C. HALLOWELL,
AUTHOR OF "BEC'S BEDTIME."



GLASGOW:
JOHN S. MARR & SONS, 194 BUCHANAN STREET.
1877.

251. c. 676.



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NAN, THE NEW-FASHIONED GIRL.

CHAPTER I.

OVER THE EMBERS.

"MOTHER, dear, when may we begin?"

"Not until you are ready."

And Mrs. Norris looked up from her work and smiled across the table. A pair of brown eyes smiled back in answer, and the shabby old jacket that Hetty was darning was taken up again with sudden energy.

But on the other side of the table there was evidently cloudy weather. A tall girl of sixteen sat by the open grate, looking into the coals, and resting her foot upon the lower bar, regardless of the slight hints of scorching leather that came up from it. Nan lived

and walked in dreamland most of the time; so perhaps it was very natural that she could but seldom come down to think of boots or boot-laces.

It was Nan who had asked, somewhat impatiently, but in the softened tone with which the girls always spoke to their mother, "When may we begin?"

There was small comfort in the answer, Nan thought, but she went on,—

"I am so tall, mother, that every one thinks I am older. Why can't I go out to teach?"

Mrs. Norris shook her head.

"Well then, mother, we are growing poorer and poorer all the time, and how are we ever to help matters if you don't let us begin? Hetty, you are provoking! You think just as I do, and yet you don't say a word. Why, mother,"—and Nan rose up with the air of an injured princess,—“we didn't sleep any all last night for worrying about that old doctor's bill, and all.”

Hetty glanced reproof at her sister, as a troubled look came into Mrs. Norris' eyes. But the mother's quiet voice answered,—

"You are not old enough, nor wise enough to teach

yet. Bear out a little longer with your school-drudgery, as you think it. You will be steady and ready some day. Besides," pointing with a sad smile to her daughter's waistbelt, "what kind of a lesson would that be to your scholars?"

Nan coloured, and, looking down on the gap where the folds of her dress were torn from the waist, said quickly,—“Yes, I caught it on the door this morning as I went out to school. I pinned it up there; there was no time to sew it.”

Mrs. Norris looked quietly up at the clock, which was pointing to nine.

“I know—yes, yes, mother,” said the girl, growing crimson to the temples. “I know I ought to be sewing it now, instead of mooning away all the evening, and wishing. But O mother, it is so hard to want things,—to want to be like other girls, and know you might, some day, earn them,—the things, I mean.”

And Nan stood again dreamily gazing into the fire.

“Here, Nan,” said Hetty quickly, “slip on this,” taking up a blue flannel sacque from the chair where it lay upon a pile of books. “Now my needle is

threaded I may as well mend your dress. It is too cold upstairs, mother dear, to sit and sew," coaxingly to her mother, who had seemed about to speak.

But a movement in the adjoining room made Mrs. Norris start. There was a sharp cough, and an "Oh, dear!" that was almost a moan.

"Father is awake," and the mother threw down her work and left the room, closing the door softly behind her.

Nan in the meantime had tossed her dress over to Hetty, and drawing the sacque close over her white shoulders, sat down again in the chair by the fire. Hetty took up the dress as a matter of course, and began gravely to arrange the plaits, pinning them, altering a fold here and there, and holding the dress at arm's length to see the effect before she began to sew.

"Nan, this dreadful grease-spot! I can hide it partly, but can't you take it out?"

Nan did not answer, and Hetty, after waiting a moment, began to sew rapidly.

A stranger would have said the two faces were singularly alike, and so they were in colouring and outline. Nan's hair was dark and hung in masses over her shoulders, a fashion she had adopted years

ago, on seeing some pictures in *Punch*, and long before the negligent mode had crossed the water. "It saves ever so much trouble," she had said.

Her forehead was low and broad, and her brown eyes looked out dreamily from under a pair of discontented eyebrows, delicate brows enough, but raised, as though in ill-humour with all the world. She had a pretty little nose, and her mouth was charming when she smiled, which wasn't very often. So that her face had the effect, almost always, of cloudy weather; it did not light up.

Hetty, on the contrary, was all light and life. In spite of her silence during the evening her eyes had talked all through. They had looked reproof and annoyance at Nan; and from time to time they had sought her mother's face with such beaming comfort and goodness in them that no words were needed. For the rest she was just a sunshiny Nan, except that her hair, a shade lighter than Nan's, was stretched back, and braided into two "Kenwigs," firmly tied with brown ribbons.

"Oh, dear!" pouted Nan, "if mother would only let me go out as governess, I'd save enough money in three years to pay old Arnold for lessons."

"Here's your dress," said Hetty, throwing it across the table, and proceeding to set back the chairs and "straighten up" the room.

"Now, Hetty, do you mean by that that nobody would have me for governess so long as I am careless and have grease spots?"

"My dear," said Hetty, "don't talk so loud; you'll disturb father. I don't believe mother is coming back to-night," she went on, softly fastening the shutter, "so won't you cover up the fire, Nan, before you come to bed?"

"Yes," said Nan shortly, going on with her musing over the coals.

Hetty vanished, but came back in a few minutes with a bowl containing lumps of ice, and a little pitcher on a tray.

The knock on the sick room door was the gentlest tap in the world, but the door opened, and she handed in the tray.

"The milk for father and the ice. Will he want anything more to night?"

"No, I hope he will sleep. He seems quite drowsy now."

"Dear marmsey, if I come down at four"—

The mother shook her head.

"And go to school at nine? No, my dear; watching and lessons don't go well together."

"When it is daylight then, mother, you will let me come."

The mother kissed the pleading little lips, and closed the door again.

"Remember, Nan," said Hetty again as she passed her, "don't let the fire go out."

"Nonsense!" said Nan sharply, "I am not a baby. Dear old Het."—with an instant change of tone—"I don't mean to be cross; but to be for ever told and told is enough to try the patience of a saint."

Nan was no saint, sure enough; her own conscience told her that, as she sat in the glow of the coals; Hetty had carried the lamp away with her.

"Careless and cross! I know it," she said under her breath: "only it makes me mad to be told. If they would only let me"—

And visions of the coming time when, as "Miss Norris, Artist," she should sit by her own easel and fix her own prices for portraits, came thronging into her mind.

There was a stir above stairs after a time, but

Nan took no notice. A child cried, and there was a desperate rocking, as though a chair not meant for a rocking-chair, was moved rapidly backward and forward.

But soon the house was very still, and Nan, her head resting on her hand and her feet on the bars of the grate, gazed with deeper and deeper attention into the coals. At last the dress fell from her lap, and one arm dropped carelessly by her side. Her eyes were closed, and her dreams were sound now, for she was asleep.

Asleep! By the fire! Won't her clothes catch? Won't she burn up by morning?

No danger, dear reader, for the fire was out!

Yes, the fire was out, and so we cannot see by its light the worn old carpet and the faded window blinds. But we know as well as though we did see them, that things had been very much on the downward track with the Norrises for the past year.

The father of Nan and Hetty and of the two stout boys and chubby baby above stairs, had been for many years the confidential bookkeeper of Bustle and Co., merchants on the north wharves. But he had

been disabled of late by an attack of cold and fever, ending in a severe inflammation of the eyes. He had been compelled to live in a darkened room for many weeks, and his incessant worry and anxiety had brought on a return of the fever. This was passing off now, but the eyes were no better, and the old fret had begun again.

Poor man! He had received a letter that very day from Bustle & Co. stating, that being obliged to fill his post during his absence, they must advise him that he was entitled to draw but half his usual salary, until such time as he could return to his post, or signify by letter of resignation that he withdrew from it altogether.

It was this letter, coming at the first of the year, with the dreaded doctor's bill, that had thrown the whole family into despondency.

"It is all very kind in Bustle & Co. on the face," the poor invalid had said, "but they plainly ask me to resign. What am I to do? I *must* get well!"

In vain Mrs. Norris had tried to comfort; in vain Hetty and Nan had spoken cheerfully of the future; there was no denying the fact that father was evidently much worse because of the letter.

Things looked hopeless, indeed!

The Norrises were accustomed to simplicity in many things, but they had always a generous household. With his girls the father was lavish. If Nan had been indeed a young princess, her tastes and wishes could not have been more carefully studied and gratified.

He was so proud of his daughters, John Norris, of Nan's beauty and artistic fancies, and of Hetty's bright ways.

"Dancing school? Why not? Let them enjoy themselves, Margaret. If Nan wants a blue silk, let her have it. I shall always, thank Heaven, be able to take care of my daughters."

"They shall see an opera. Yes, they are old enough. When 'Martha' is played, girls, you shall go."

And Margaret, their mother, was willing that they should, only she sighed at times lest anything should come in to darken the bright future which the fond father planned.

She had croaked into her daughters' ears until she seemed to herself a very raven of foreboding, that perhaps all their brightness might not last; and

thanks to her, there was a practical side to the princesses.

And now the "perhaps" had come. Through the long autumn they had tried to save, to "make things do," knowing they were living on the liberality of Bustle & Co., dreading lest some day this support should fail, watching and caring and hoping.

"I do believe in the total depravity of inanimate things," Hetty would say. "Look at that sofa, slit to pieces all on purpose just now. It would have lasted for years if we hadn't been poor, but now it must wear out, of course."

Glass and china fell with crashes, heard with dismay, because there were no means to replace them as dainty as before.

"Who told the coals to fly out and burn this great hole in the carpet, right in full view?" said Miss Hetty. "Mother spent days in October, planning and fixing where the old breadths were to go, and now look here! Right in front, and the very best part of the carpet. I've no patience with things!"

It was too bad. But when wear and tear have

reached a certain point it is easy down hill after that to shabbiness.

Perhaps the fact that there was the stoutest, willingest, awkwardest Delia Doran in the kitchen, released from Mrs. Norris' watchful eyes, had added to the plunge the whole house seemed making from a comfortable home into——.

"Wretchedness!" That was Nan's word, as she waked suddenly at midnight before the dark and dead fire, and shiveringly groped her way over to the sofa. Her shawl and school-books were lying there, she very well knew, if it was dark; and drawing the shawl up over her head, she proceeded to settle herself for the night. Of course the school-books fell down with a bang—she had not thought of that; but fortunately no one stirred.

"Hetty won't miss me till morning, if that don't waken her. I should only disturb her if I went upstairs. And I always can sleep better on a sofa."

Nan enjoyed doing out-of-the-way things; she disliked to go to bed by rule, and greatly preferred, as in the present case, not to go to bed at all.

Fortunately the banging books had wakened no one, and in the next room the tired invalid slept peacefully till dawn.





CHAPTER II.

TWO MOVES IN THE GAME.

WHEN the gray light of early morning began to steal into the upper room, a little figure sprang up and dressed hastily. The water in the pitcher was not exactly a "mask of ice," as Sam Waller expresses it, but it was so tingling cold that Hetty's toilet was soon made. As she threw open the sitting-room door, instead of the cheery glow she expected to see, all was dark. She groped her way to a window and opened the shutters. There lay Nan on the sofa, covered with a shawl, and sound asleep.

Hetty was no Griselda. A pattern child would, I suppose, have set to work on the fire, and then gently roused the careless Nan when the room was warm again.

But Miss Hetty was of different metal. She went to the sofa and shook the sleeper vigorously.

"Nan! Nan! get awake—*do!* Hurry! make up the fire before mother comes out, or else she will do it herself."

Nan rubbed her eyes, and stared stupidly at Hetty for a minute, then sat straight up and seemed to comprehend. Still wrapped in the shawl, she walked over to the grate with an air that was half dignity, half sleepiness. But in another minute, and without a spoken word, she was down on her knees before the grate, and rattling away at the coals, while Hetty on tip-toe listened softly at her father's door.

Soon, thanks to Nan's rattling, there was a sound of awakening in his room, and Hetty opened the door and went in noiselessly. Her father was awake. The waking-hour was the hardest for John Norris to bear. All the weight of his troubles seemed to come upon him then, and he required an immensity of cheering up.

"What *is* that noise?" he asked impatiently. "Will that girl ever learn not to make such a racket so early?"

"It isn't Delia this time, father," said Hetty, for she knew that his wrath would fall lightly on

Nan; "it is only Nan and me. We'll have a cup of coffee in a few minutes, father," and Hetty disappeared.

But Nan was still shaking down the ashes, and the fire in the sitting-room was the only one kept burning all night. So Hetty hurried into the kitchen, where the Irish maid was briskly unbolting the outer door.

"Some sticks, quick, Delia," and Delia brought in an armful of light wood from the shed. No hand but Hetty's must make the coffee that morning. So while Delia coaxed the little pyramid of sticks into a blaze on the hearth, Hetty pounded the coffee, and broke an egg into the shining little tin pot.

"Not so much water, Delia, please," as Miss Doran at last approached with the steaming kettle; "you'll drown it."

And Hetty carefully measured in the due proportions, and covered up the coffee-pot quickly, setting it over the blazing sticks.

Drowning the coffee, and salting every article of food, as though for a long sea-voyage, were Miss Doran's chief accomplishments; yet she was strong and good-natured, and Mrs. Norris could not dis-

pense with the stout arms and "willing mind" of her handmaid.

"Messess! That is the only word for it," John Norris had said only yesterday, making a wry face over his dinner. "Margaret, how can you stand such cookery?"

And Mrs. Norris, distracted with nursing and darning, and the hungry mouths to feed, had scarcely dared to think of the relief an experienced cook would be to soul and body just now.

"We can't afford it," she said confidentially to Hetty, who, a year younger than Nan, was still her mother's intimate. "We cannot afford to pay any higher wages than we give Delia, and we could never get any one better for that, I know."

"Mother, do you think I could help a little?" Hetty had said timidly. "It is such fun to make candy that I have always wanted to learn to cook. And you know that I can make gingerbread."

"You might try," said Mrs. Norris. "You couldn't do worse than Delia. If I could only leave your father long enough to show her the right way!"

For the invalid was restless and uneasy if his wife left him for a moment in the daytime. In the even-

ing he seemed more quiet; he did not feel his dimmed sight so painfully in the darkness as in the glaring daylight, and then the mother could snatch an occasional hour with her girls. But the heaped work-basket was ever waiting, and Mrs. Norris was too tired for any skirmishes in the kitchen. So matters had gone on until Hetty now had taken the field.

This was the first experiment; unknown to the mother she had studied a cookery-book, and laid her plans the night before. Delia adored the bright young lady, and for a wonder stood submissive before the newcomer's rapid movement.

"Now, Delia," said Hetty, as she placed the cup of coffee on a tray, and covered it with a tiny saucer, "please let me help with breakfast this morning. I am so tired with having the children all night that I want a little change. Won't you go up and dress them this morning, and let me get breakfast, for variety."

Delia assented, open-eyed in wonder at the change that had come over Miss Hetty, and that young lady called in Nan, who was finishing her toilet upstairs.

"Quick, Nan, take this in to father," holding out

the tray. Nan took it, and putting on her cheeriest smile, walked up to her father's bedside.

"That's my darling," said John Norris, "always thinking of poor father. Delicious!" sipping at the coffee. "This is something like. Nan, you are worth a dozen Delias."

"I don't know," said Nan, "who made this. *I* didn't; and Delia is upstairs with the boys. I guess there is a fairy in the kitchen."

Mrs. Norris looked up suddenly, as though taking up a forgotten stitch in yesterday's talk.

"Yes," Nan went on, nodding her head at her mother. "Cinderella had a dreadful time with her ashes this morning. I think it must be the proud sister who made this."

As if the thought of Hetty had brought suggestions with it, Nan went quickly about the room. She hung up towels, put chairs in their places, and gathered together some empty bottles, until the room was a very picture of neatness and comfort.

"I am sure father can eat this," said Hetty, putting down in triumph a neatly-cooked steak in the dining-room, while Delia brought up the rear with a large bowl of oatmeal porridge. Nan in the meantime was

putting the finishing touches to the table. "Delia makes splendid porridge, mother, and"—in a whisper—"I persuaded her to let me put in the salt."

While Nan was dreaming and grumbling over her mission and her work, Hetty had quietly slipped into hers. It was not easy always to avoid hurting Miss Doran's pride, but Hetty put it on the right ground from the first.

"Delia, I want to learn how to cook. Won't you teach me all you know?" Delia had graciously consented, and the noon hour became a tournament, in which the learner skilfully introduced new devices and dishes, and rescued many a delicate morsel from salt and scorch.

"But, my dear," Mrs. Norris objected with a sigh, "you will never have a minute's time for rest. You will go back to school so tired."

"Mother, my child, I'm immensely strong. Besides, it's fun."

I really believe it was. The coarser preparations were left to Delia. "Potato-paring I hate," said Hetty, "but I do enjoy seeing them boil, popping up their heads so!" And Hetty lifted the lid and speared a potato on her fork, shaking her

head gravely if it had not arrived at the proper mealiness.

There was an old grandmother receipt book, a legacy from John Norris' mother, into which Hetty dived for old-fashioned dishes that might bring back to her father his forgotten boyish tastes. She read among the yellow pages and in the fine cobweb hand-writing of her grandmother, and occasionally she would burst upon them with some old dish, whose name even was a talisman to the invalid.

"Gracious! Did they ever do anything else but cook in those days, I wonder," said Hetty. "Look at this mock-turtle soup now. Such a pounding and mixing and boiling for days beforehand. Did my grandmother ever sew on any buttons, or did she give all her time to good things?"

Such questions did her father good. They made him laugh, and carried him back to the old times, when his mother, with her three aprons on, stood before her kitchen hearth.

"Three aprons!" cried astonished Nan. "And I can never remember to put on one!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Norris, who too had her memo-

ries, "a silk apron underneath, over that a white one, and a check apron over all, for every day."

"Did anybody ever see the under apron?" asked Nan.

"Oh, yes. For every day company the check apron was taken off, and her white one revealed. But when distinguished visitors came, a visiting clergyman, or judge on his circuit, the white apron was shed likewise, and the black silk, the apron of full dress, shone out in all its glory."

"A toilet was a snatch in those days," said Hetty; "put one off for common folks, put two off for great folks."

"It is all putting on now-a-days," said Nan. "If the door bell were to ring this minute, I should rush upstairs and put on my blue cravat and a blue ribbon in my hair. It is very fine to be always ready for visitors, but I do like to *prink* a little, to astonish them with an extra touch when I go down."

For all her gay words, and she tried to be always gay in her father's room, Nan had many a gloomy reverie outside the door. She roused herself with an effort to follow Hetty's lead, and took up the house-

hold work with sudden energy, when Hetty's voice broke into her day dreams.

"Do go undress the children, Nan," Hetty would say, studying hard at her Latin, while Delia was clashing cups and saucers in the kitchen, after the tea table was cleared away. "I can't spare a minute from this, for I must have muffins for father in the morning; *mum, mum, mum,*" and Hetty went on, swaying herself at every line.

Nan went obediently; and the boys romped around for a full hour, while "sister" pensively undressed baby. When baby at last threw her shoe into the bath tub that stood ready before the fire, or the boys, in playing ship, had thrown all the pillows and bolsters into the middle of the floor, Nan would rouse, suddenly charge in upon them, and sweep the entire little platoon into bed before they had time to rebel.

She had a lightning way of coming to rights herself, and settling the nursery in order, that went far to make a balance, but in the meantime Mrs. Norris and Hetty had listened with dismay to the ominous sounds overhead.

"Nan is worried, mother," Hetty said, as Mrs.

Norris was about to proceed to the scene of conflict; "she is making up her mind what to do in the world, and she can do so much. Her drawings are splendid. That likeness of Bob, Mr. Arnold said, ought to be exhibited."

Mrs. Norris shook her head. "If she would only finish any one thing. I don't believe Bob's curls are done yet, are they?"

There were half-a-dozen unfinished drawings on Nan's old yellow pine easel at this moment, one under the other, like the grandmother's aprons. One of them was a monogram, designed for her father in his well days, when he was a smoker. The J was a meer-schaum pipe, beautifully coloured in golden browns, and the gray rings of smoke that rose out of it and curled about the bowl made a shadowy letter N. But the pipe had been thrown aside months ago, and Nan had no heart to finish the monogram.

Amid all the nursery echoes, one thought filled her mind, the possibility of taking lessons. Mr. Arnold, whom Hetty had named with awe, was an eccentric artist in the town. He kept a shop of "Colours and Artists' Materials," which was in charge of his only son, a strange little hunchback.

The boy, a youth of nineteen, though he was no taller than a child of twelve, did not inherit his father's genius, and served in the shop somewhat unwillingly. When the bell at the opening door summoned him he generally appeared from a little back room, where he sat surrounded by coils of wire and curious jars.

He came forward one afternoon, with blackened hands, as the door opened to admit Nan. It was the day after her dream in the nursery, and the dream had taken shape, it seemed, in a resolve.

"Can I see your father?" asked Nan shyly; she never could look at the strange boy without a feeling of dread.

"S'pose so," said the hunchback gruffly; "'s upstairs."

"Won't you ask him if I may come up?"

"Just you go on up. There's nobody up there but the charcoal man."





CHAPTER III.

SHIRTS.

"The charcoal man?" said Nan, drawing back. When she was a very little girl she used to run away from the blue-frocked figure, ringing his bell.

"Father's paintin' 'im." And, showing her the stairs with a jerk of his arm, the boy dragged himself back to his dingy workshop again.

Nan stumbled up the dark, narrow stairs, treading on her dress, but holding tight her precious roll of sketches. Timidly opening the door, a strange scene was before her. The charcoal man, blue frock, blackened face and all, stood with mouth wide open—such a red mouth it was in contrast with his face,—head thrown back, and bell swung high in his hand; while on the easel was his counterfeit presentment, so like, that Nan held her breath in wonder and delight.

Mr. Arnold took no notice, and Nan stepped softly

into a corner, and perched herself on the arm of an old chair, to watch the artist's rapid fingers. Once in five minutes or so the charcoal-man would cry out, "Charcoal!" and bring down his bell with a swing, coming back again instantly to his former position. Perhaps to rest himself, this little byeplay; perhaps to throw more of spirit and reality into the figure. It was half an hour, though to her it seemed but ten minutes, when Mr. Arnold threw down his brush, as the fading light warned him to quit work. The charcoal-man was dismissed with a word, and then, walking backward to view his picture with hand over brow, the artist stumbled upon Nan.

"Why, little girl! When did you come? One of the little mousies, isn't it? How's your father?"

"Better to-day, thank you," and Nan, hurrying on to the precious object of her visit, held out her sketches.

"Please, Mr. Arnold, look at them. You liked this picture of Bob, and now it is finished I've brought these others with it."

Finished—Nan! That was why your candle burned so late last night, and why you were stirring this morning at sunrise.

"Well," said the artist, after a prolonged survey and a "Humph!" over the monogram, to which Nan had added some hasty touches, "Well, what do you want me to do? To hunt up somebody whose initials are J. N. or N. J., some Nehemiah Jones, and make him buy your monogram?"

"Oh, no. I only put the monogram in to make up the six. I thought if I brought only one or two things you would not think I was in earnest."

"About what?"

"About learning," said Nan. "O Mr. Arnold," taking courage at last, "there is so much I don't know. I can't finish anything, because I don't know how."

"Very likely," said Mr. Arnold shortly; "what then?"

"This," producing a cross of gold filigree, one of those pretty Maltese crosses that come from Genoa, "father gave me this a year ago; and here," drawing from her neck an old-fashioned chain, whose half-dozen strands were clasped by a quaint little locket, "here's what my Grandmother Norris left me in her will. They are mine to do what I please with. Now we are poor, I mean to sell them. Would they pay

for some lessons?" and Nan looked up with her eager eyes into Mr. Arnold's face.

Something in the clear brown eyes checked the first answer that came to his lips; he began to speak and stopped suddenly.

"Does your father know you've come?"

"Don't you know father is ill?" she asked in her turn. "He must not be worried about anything, he has been ill for so long, but I've told Hetty."

"Who is Hetty?"

"My sister. And I asked mother the other day whether there would be any harm, if I wanted to do something great, to sell my things; and she laughed and said, 'No, not if it was to do something great.' Here's my gold piece," holding it out, "that I've had ever since the war."

"Miss Norris," said the artist, with a sudden courtesy in his tone, "these things would be of no use to me."

"I thought," said Nan falteringly, "if you would put the cross in the shop-window somebody who came in might like to buy it; and—to hang the chain over the frame of that Venetian lady, it would show best that way."

Mr. Arnold smiled.

"You know how to make pictures, I see. But I could not sell them in a year, perhaps, and if you were to take them to a jeweller he would give you very little for them. He would think them so old-fashioned that he would pay only for the gold," weighing the chain lightly in his hand as he spoke.

"But I tell you what I do want," he said laughing, "a set of shirts!" And he held up his wrist, and displayed a frayed and tattered wristband. "If you will make me a set of shirts I'll give you as many lessons as you like."

"But I must have the shirts first," he said, as he saw the rapid change in Nan's face. "Do you like to sew?"

"No," said Nan frankly, "I don't. But I will do anything to take lessons."

"Very well. It is a bargain, then."

Mr. Arnold raised the back window, which looked out into the yard, and called, "Beulah! Beulah!"

As Nan curiously looked out of the window too, a little old woman, with sleeves up-rolled and wiping the soap-suds from her skinny arms, came

out from under a shed, and looked up at them inquiringly.

"Come up here, Beulah, please."

"Beulah's eyes are quite worn out," he said, turning to Nan; "she can't manage to cook and keep house for Leonard and me, but she cannot see to sew."

Beulah was the old housekeeper. Nan remembered now that Mr. Arnold's wife had died years before, and that this old woman took care of his household.

The old woman's head appeared on the stairway.

"Beulah, can you find a shirt to give for a pattern to this young lady? She is going to make me a set."

Beulah stared, and muttering, "Young lady, indeed! Fine shirt she'll make; pretty work she'll make," went upstairs to an upper room.

"How many is a set?" asked Nan, turning desperately to Mr. Arnold.

"I don't know," said he laughing; "ask your mother."

Downstairs again came the old woman, holding

out a tattered garment that had evidently been put away rough dried, as past the power of starch or darning.

"Here's your shirt," and she held it out to Nan. "Mind, now, none of your machine work on 'em. I can't abide machine work. It all pulls and pulls when you go to iron it. You can't make it look decent nohow. I won't wash a machine-made shirt."

And she faced Nan like a fate.

Poor Nan! She had had a vision of rushing wheels, and of hurrying through the work, with Hetty's help, by machine. Ruefully she stretched out her hand for the shirt.

"Would it be so very bad, Beulah?" asked Mr. Arnold amused, and laughing in spite of himself.

"Yes—you'd see. The buzzoms all wear through as though a knife had cut 'em, and clear holes where the needle goes in. She shan't make 'em if she's going to put machine work in 'em. My niece's daughter'll do 'em as cheap as she would, and every stitch by hand," she added in a confidential loud whisper to Mr. Arnold.

"Give it to me," said Nan. "I'll do it, too, every stitch by hand."

She rolled up the shirt in the paper that had enwrapped the dear sketches. She was about to put them up, too, when Mr. Arnold said—

"Please leave them. I want to look again at the little fellow with the curls."

And he made a polite bow to Nan, as he held the door open for her to go downstairs.

"Dreadful old thing!" said Nan to Hetty, arrived at home, and unrolling her bundle in her own room upstairs. "It's all holes! Old thing! wouldn't let a stitch be done by machine."

"What are you talking about," said Hetty laughing, "the shirt, or Mr. Arnold?"

"It is the housekeeper, Beulah, I mean. Doesn't that mean something pleasant? That's all there is nice about her then—her name. She is a witch, I do believe. She had a caldron of something smoking in the yard, and came upstairs with a stick in her hand. I wish she would fly away, I know, before the shirts are done."

"A kettle of clothes, of course," said Hetty, "over a furnace."

"There were soapsuds, come to think of it, on her arms and on her apron."

"Where are you to get the linen and muslin from?" asked Hetty, turning over the shirt. "This is beautifully fine linen."

"Is it?" said Nan. "Mercy! I never thought of that. Oh! I'll take my gold piece."

"The gold piece that father gave us in '63, to remember the year by? Your New Year's present, Nan?"

"Yes," said Nan decidedly; "we were so little then that it helped us to remember. But if I have to *slave* over these shirts, and do every stitch by hand, I shan't need any other reminder."

Mrs. Norris consulted, decided that a set was a dozen, without a doubt.

"Please, mother, don't ask any questions," sighed Nan ruefully, as this point was settled. "Let me do it all myself."

"I can't bear, Hetty, that mother should know about the gold piece just yet. It would make her feel bad, as though we were sacrificing something. But oh, my precious," hugging her easel in both arms, "it is no sacrifice for you!"

But Nan's views of sacrifice were destined to undergo a change.

"There is one comfort in that old Beulah," she said as she sat down to rip apart the old shirt for a pattern, "these stitches come out easily enough. If this had been sewing-machined it would take me a week."

Nan's estimate of material was a liberal one. It took her gold piece and some hoarded dollar of Hetty's besides to pay for the muslin and linen. And even then there was wastage of great pitces, which made the thrifty Hetty sigh, as she looked round the littered room.

Nan, either to avoid adding to her mother's cares, or from some unconfessed pride in doing it all herself, brushed aside her mother's assistance, and begged to be let alone.

With hair tucked up she cut and basted and fitted, wrinkling up her brows with magnificent energy.

"We will make one up," Hetty said, "and let Delia iron it nicely, before we go on with the others. We can send it to Mr. Arnold to see if it suits him."

"Yes; that will be best. Hetty, how can you be so wise?"

Hetty did not intimate that the wisdom was distilled from a gentle hint of her mother's. Nan was to be let alone in her unapproachable glory.

The first shirt was soon done, and Delia was despatched to the studio with Miss Norris' compliments, and would Mr. Arnold please let her know by a little note if any alteration was required.

"Shure, and the shop's possessed like!" said Delia, returning from her errand. "Such a tickin' an' tackin' as there wur in the back room, when the old ooman opened the door."

"Didn't a deformed boy come into the shop?"

"The little hoonchback, is it the craythur? No, he sits in the back room where all the tickin' was, and somethin' whirlin' round like mad; and he laughs and says, 'Tell Miss Norris I'll send her the ansoor by tillygraf.'"

"That was the meaning of all his machines," said Nan; "he is learning to telegraph. I should think that would not be half so nice as his father's work, with all those lovely crayons, and the darling little colour tubes."

"Does the old woman tend the shop now?" asked Hetty.

"Deed an' she did, miss; she nearly tended my head off when she found out what I'd brought!"

That night brought a note from Mr. Arnold.

"The shirt was very neat and satisfactory; and, pardon his negligence, he had not thought of the materials. Would Miss Norris tell him how much he was her debtor beyond the ten dollar bill enclosed?"

Poor Nan! She took up the crisp bit of paper, new and clean though it was, and thought with a pang of the lost pocket-piece.

"I don't mind spending this at all. I'll spend it, every cent, on things. I won't have it to remind me of the dear old gold piece."

But there were so many "things" needed in the household, as the winter days lengthened into spring, that Nan's first impulses towards luxury were checked in the very start.





CHAPTER IV.

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW.

"I HAVE hunted this house," said Hetty one morning in April, "for a Virgil. I was sure there was an old one among mother's school-books that would do; but I can't find it, and the class goes into it to-morrow. What is to be done?"

"Can't you get an old one at Gleery's?" asked Nan, suddenly becoming interested, and thrusting into her pocket a slip of paper on which she had been scribbling some figures.

"No; for three girls went there yesterday, and bought the only copy he had. I have a great mind to go round from house to house with a basket and beg, 'Have you any old Virgils?' There must be dozens of them stowed away in garrets."

"How much does a new one cost?"

"Two dollars. I cannot ask mother for it; I

wonder if I can't go shares with one of the girls, and get my lesson while she is asleep at midnight."

Nan made a wry face, and took up a wristband again, stitching with fierce energy. She was working on number ten of the shirts, and it had come to be very stupid and uphill work with her.

"All by hand," she groaned each day, while the little sewing-machine stood idle in the room below. She had had very little help since number one was gotten up with such marvellous neatness and despatch. Hetty was so very tired when lessons and cooking were over. The school duties were heavy, too, just now on poor Hetty.

Miss Brown was unaccountably pushing the poor child—*cramming* it would have been to a duller brain. Hetty could see no reason in the over-work, the test questions, and her frequent calls to the black board. "Out of all turn," she confided to Nan, "she calls on me every other minute."

In that dark time in the new year, when poverty had knocked so loudly at the door, the girls had been withdrawn from the private school they had attended for years, and their names were entered in the public school for the Fifth District. But Miss

Brown, closeted with Hetty's mother for two mortal hours, had so insisted on keeping her favourite pupil, and had given such good reasons and assurances that the one poor little school-bill was nothing to her, that Mrs. Norris had consented; and Hetty remained with the aristocratic young ladies of B.

Nan seemed to survive the transplanting and thrive on it. The contrast at lesson-time was marked.

"Hetty, you are an exotic, and I am only a common turnip," said Nan; "though what use the Constitution of the United States will ever be to turnips I am unable to see."

But when the Constitution was mastered Nan was ready for other things, while Hetty, struggling with Cæsar through German forests, was an unapproachable object till bedtime.

"About that Virgil," said Nan, returning to the charge in the noon interval, "I suppose I'll have to give you money to buy it."

"You!" cried Hetty in astonishment. "What have you sold now?"

"Nothing. But here it is," producing a brown paper parcel.

"You dear old thing! how could you?" and Hetty

buried her face among the fresh leaves, inhaling that indescribable aroma so dear to book-lovers.

"Miss Hetty!" called Delia from the kitchen, "please come to the pudding." And the next minute the little cook was bent over the "steamer," deftly dislodging a pudding from its mould.

Nan gave a sigh to the crumpled list. "Shoes, eight dollars. Ribbons, &c., two dollars. Dear me! there's another illusion gone. I did think for once I'd have some fresh ribbons, and look like other people."

Ribbons, especially a lovely turquoise blue that she had set her heart on, were among Nan's little, or rather great weaknesses.

"Such a lovely shade of blossom pink too; it would look so well in Hetty's brown braids. It is so hard to be a lady when you must wear an everlasting cravat and ribbon with everything, no matter how it calls names to your dress and bonnet. I could be so lovely if I had just a little money. I would have a gray dress always, a soft, gray dress, and light it up with scarlet, or soften it with blue, just as I felt sober or bright.

"But this rusty brown thing," shaking out her stuff

dress, "you cannot suit a live colour to it but orange, and I see myself in that!"

Hetty never knew what the "two dollars for *etc.*" had meant. Nan had not the heart to tell her, but she did take her into consultation over the shoes.

"Such lovely bronze boots down at Ford's, and cheap too. Surely, Hetty, we may get them. You know there is the May-party—we will have to go to that."

The girls had declined all invitations except here and there a "plain tea;" indeed they had not thought of gaiety while their father was so ill. But now he was better, sat long hours by the open window, and listened to the blue-birds in the maples in the yard.

The May-party was not an out-door party, but a gay affair up at old Mrs. Jamieson's, given to her granddaughter, May Jamieson. She took her name from the month, and had a birthday party on the 15th, every year.

"A southern strawberry festival!" said Hetty; "it's too early for the genuine northern article."

But the great old drawing-rooms that dosed in solemn state half the year, in their Holland shroud-

ings, were flung open then; and there was music, "five pieces," as May said, though she meant performers. Altogether, it was a delightful and dazzling occasion.

The Norrises had never missed it since their first sashes; they could count up ten parties at least. This year, though, Mrs. Norris shook her head, and even the girls demurred. John Norris insisted they should go.

"Let them enjoy themselves once more anyhow. They have been shut up quite enough this winter, I am sure."

As it seemed to be quite a point with him, the girls gave way, and many an anxious consultation over the wardrobe was the result. Even the precious shirts were laid aside as the great day drew near.

"I wish I had some decent, quiet dress, instead of this finery," said Nan, as she drew the once treasured blue silk from its wrap in an old linen table-cloth. "I've worn it these two years, straight through, and I am sick of it. To look so fine! If I only had a cool, gray poplin."

"Can't you make a summer dress do?" said the

sympathising Hetty, as she shook her own well-kept white muslin from the blue paper folds her careful mother had placed it in.

"No, they are all such faded things. I looked them over this morning. And I tore my pink batiste to tatters in that last picnic we had in the summer. I wish this was only a fancy party. I could make such a lovely nun's dress out of our two browns. How would it do to go that way anyhow?"

"Father would not like it, I think."

And John Norris, consulted, said decidedly "No."

"Don't do anything conspicuous, Nan. Wear your blue dress; that is pretty enough."

So poor Nan, with a heavy heart, for she felt the old blue finery quite a weight on her spirits, began to sew in the treasured bit of Valenciennes lace around the neck and arms.

"We must settle about the bronze to-day, Hetty. What about it?"

For Hetty had begged for a suspension of judgment until the 14th, lest something should happen to keep them at home.

"You get bronze, if you want," said Hetty de-

cidedly, "but I won't. Old bronze boots would be as bad as old blue silks; and we should have to wear them for ever, you know."

So Nan yielded to this supreme argument, and the treasured remnant of her crisp bank-note went for shoes of shining black.

"Cousin Jim is downstairs," called up little Bob from below, on the morning of the eventful day.

"Cousin Jim!"

And there was a toss of muslin on one side and lace on the other, while the girls ran downstairs to greet the newcomer.

Cousin Jim was a young engineer, who paid only occasional and flying visits to B. He was a bronzed and bearded fellow, tall and handsome; very proud of his cousins, and they returned the compliment with interest.

"Jim, you must come to the May-party," cried Nan. "It will be just heavenly to walk into the room on your arm. Hetty and I have to poke in beauless generally."

"But I haven't any party rig—any dress-coat," said Jim with assumed anxiety.

"Nonsense! Half the beaux are in jackets, and

the fathers come in overcoats, some of them. Your coat will never be noticed, and I'll make you up the loveliest white neck-tie," said Hetty, whirling round in a preliminary waltz.

Even the dismal old blue silk was forgotten in the glory of an escort. And Nan thought, as she clasped the quaint chain around her neck, and drew on her well-saved pair of lemon kid gloves, "Well, I might as well brave it out. This is just the way I looked last year and the year before that, but I can't help it; and nobody, unless it is May Jamieson, will have the spite to tell me so."

But Nan was a picture. Not even in the year before, or the year before that, had she looked so glowing and joyous.

While Hetty's white muslin, with the pink coral necklace and clasps saved from her babyhood, was very fair and sweet.

"Bouquets! Lovely! O Jim, how could you?" exclaimed the delighted girls, as Cousin Jim, bowing low, said with a mock flourish,—

"Allow me to present these visions of beauty with a floral offering apiece."

"Oh! oh!! oh!!!" said Nan, taking long breaths

of the fragrance. "Did you ever see such tea-buds, mother, and such lovely violets! If you had brought me a camelia now, young man, I should have thrown it at you. But these lovely soft things are—too—delicious!"

"Who told you what Hetty was to wear?" turning to the pink buds and sprays of heath in her sister's hand. "Mrs. Norris, you have been consulted, I know."

"It is only humane, Jim, to fix that tie of Hetty's for you now;" and Jim suffered himself to be put in a chair, and have a firm, small bow tied squarely under his chin.

"Not a carriage, Jim!" cried Hetty, as wheels stopped before the door.

"Why not, your ladyships? Would you have had me bring a locomotive at your service?"

John Norris turned aside his head while the final goodbyes were said.

"Do I suit you, father??" asked Nan, with a low courtesy.

"Yes, yes; you always do."

"Doesn't Hetty look sweet?" in a whisper in his ear.

"Yes, yes," impatiently, and turning his head away from Hetty with a sickly attempt at a smile.

"Father seems worried about something. What is it, I wonder?" pondered Nan. "But he insisted that we should go."

And the whirling wheels carried them off to four mortal hours of dancing, crush, and vanity.

"It is no use, mother, to hide it any longer," said John Norris abruptly, as the carriage drove away. "*I could not see them at all!* The doctor told me yesterday when he looked at my eyes that they were gone at last. I kept it from you till the girls should be off. I wanted them to have one last good time."

The poor, unnerved, broken-down invalid faltered, and the tears came silently.

For a minute Mrs. Norris could not speak, but softly stroked her husband's hand as she leaned over his chair. Then came a sob, which she vainly tried to keep back; and the father and mother cried together in the silence for a little while.

"There's just one thing to do, John," she said, coming into calmness with a sudden effort, "and that is to write a letter to Bustle & Co. with your resignation,"

"And then," said John Norris harshly, "what next? The poorhouse?"

"Let us have the letter first," and his wife sat down at the table to write.

It was soon done, the few words that severed the connection of years. When the mother came to write her thanks for the generosity of the house, in so long considering her husband a member of it, her hand trembled, but her courage did not falter, and she went bravely on to the end.

"Now, John," she said, turning to him cheerfully, "let us talk it out. What if we were to sell this house and rent a cheaper one up town? We can find some pleasant little place, and soon the girls will be able to take care of themselves, and of us, perhaps."

"If I were only dead!" said her husband, with a despair in his voice she had never heard before. "If that fever had only carried me off."

"Hush! hush. Would you want to leave me alone?"

And she soothed him with her gentle hand.

"This house will bring at least eight thousand dollars, John, shouldn't you think so? You invested

Mother Norris' money to good purpose when you bought it. It's worth fully that to-day."

"Goodness, Margaret, how you swoop down on me with your plans. One would think you had been planning all winter to have me helpless. What makes you know so much about real estate to-night?"

Planning! Every day of Margaret Norris' life, since her husband's illness, had been a plan, an anxious forecasting of the future. What had she not thought and schemed in her anxious beating against the bars of poverty closing in?

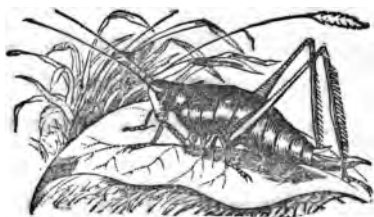
But she simply answered,—

"I met Mr. Oldfield, the conveyancer, to-day in the street, and he stopped to ask after you. 'Great rise in property, ma'am, in your neighbourhood. You are the court-end of the town now. Your house, with the fine old garden, ought to fetch eight thousand at the very least.'"

"That's five hundred a year," said her husband. "How could you manage to live on that? Don't talk nonsense, Margaret."

"Oh, with the girls' help in a little time; and we will borrow a few hundreds from our capital to start with. It will all come out right, trust to me."

How glad Mrs. Norris was that she had given the door-key to Nan. It was her custom to sit up for the girls always, if they were away in the evening from home. But to-night she had arranged for them to take the key, lest father should be disturbed in his restless sleep. She bolted her door now, that no sight nor sound of the bright young things might come to her; and Delia, in the nursery above, had already mounted her post.





CHAPTER V.

HOME-HUNTING.

THE next morning after breakfast Margaret Norris opened her heart to her daughters. Cousin Jim had taken out the boys for a walk, and the conclave was uninterrupted, save by baby's unconscious talk.

Nan was all excitement for the new plans. She scarce dwelt on the dark cause of it all—they had grown so used to father's failing sight that, perhaps for them, as for their mother, the crisis was scarcely a shock.

"Isn't it lucky, mother, I am on my last shirt to day? I'll finish it right off, and then we'll begin to pack."

"We must find a place to move to first, Nan."

"Well, the minute that Jim comes back, I'll make him go with me up town and find a house."

"Or half a house. You can't sew and hunt houses at the same time, Nan. But I must go to Mr. Oldfield at once."

"If Jim would only come!" said Nan, watching her mother from the window.

Her father still slept on in the next room, worn out with the excitement of the night before.

"Can't you sew, Nan, while you are waiting? I must go to Miss Brown and ask her to excuse me for to-day. Though I can't do that either, for she asked me to teach the youngest class their arithmetic," said poor Hetty sighing.

"You poor thing! I shall never go near school again, my mind is made up on that!" and Nan rummaged in her workbox for her thimble.

"But, Nan, we must do something, both of us. Mother is willing now."

"Yes, I know," nodded Nan, keeping her eyes steadily fixed on her sewing. "*Isn't* this the last dreadful shirt, and *won't* I begin with my drawing to-morrow? And then," a smile overflowing her face, "in a year I shall be taking portraits—you will see—and making lots of money!"

Hetty put on her hat without a word, and walked

out of the house. "In a year!" she repeated; "something must be done before then!"

"O Jim!" and Nan fell on that young gentleman as he opened the parlour door. "Do you know that father is"—but she paused as the reality of blindness came over her; never before had she felt what it was to be—"blind."

In a sobbing whisper the word was spoken, but the little boys caught it. "Blind!" cried Bobby and Neddy, wailing as though they should never see their father again.

"Hush! dear children," said Nan through her fast coming tears. "You shall see dear father as soon as he is awake. Come upstairs with sister."

And with unwonted tenderness Nan took off hats and mittens, and established the children safely at their play.

Jim in the meantime paced the parlour floor.

"Nan," he said, seizing both her hands as she entered the room, quite subdued now, and very pale. "How is it with uncle? I never thought to ask before. Was his salary all? Is there nothing else?"

"No," said Nan, "we own only this house we

stand in, and—our shoes,” with a sudden droll recollection of yesterday’s purchase.

“Hang it! Here I’ve been throwing away money right and left on this trip. It never occurred to me to save anything. If I had only known”—and Jim walked up and down with hasty strides.

Nan sat down by the window again, and took up her work.

“Mother would like me to tell you, I know, and have it over. We are going to sell this house, and—O Jim!” jumping up again,—“I want you to walk with me up town, to hunt a little place for us to rent.”

“All right,” said Jim, “come along now. Anything is better than sitting still under it.”

“As soon as mother comes. And I must go in and look at father, though I don’t want to wake him.”

John Norris lay very still as his daughter opened the door. She thought he was still asleep, and stood there, her eyes dropping tears. But her father was not asleep, and his sharpened senses had discovered that some one had come into the room. Nan’s suppressed breathing betrayed her.

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"Nan, daughter," he said feebly, his face working strangely.

In a moment Nan lay across the bed, her arms round his neck, and pouring forth a torrent of comfort and soothing, such petting words and ways as her father loved. Mrs. Norris came in, and found them hand in hand, and thus John Norris' first day of helpless acknowledged blindness began.

"Get your hat, Nan," said Cousin Jim hurriedly; he had had a little talk with his aunt since she came back from Mr. Oldfield's. "Let us start."

Nan always enjoyed a walk with Jim. A masculine companion was a rare event in her life. "We don't know any boys," she had often said to the school-girls, in their various confidences, over this or that "real splendid" boy. And, indeed, it was a juvenile Cranford life that these two maidens lived in the old Maple Street house.

But now she was dashing along, leaning on Jim's arm, with the excitement of novelty that a change, even for the poorer, brings to all young things.

"All the way out to the railroad," Mrs. Norris had said, looking over some cards from Mr. Oldfield.

"To the railroad? that's familiar," said Jim, and as they reached the shabby outskirts of the town, "Why, Nan, I am at home; this is our road."

"Your road, Jim? I thought you were up in Greene County, among the wild cats!"

"Yes, the other end is. This is the beginning. Yes, the B. W. & E. R. R. are my masters."

"Mercy! what hieroglyphics! How long do your masters give you holiday?"

"Ten days," said Jim, speaking soberly. "Nan, I was going to ask aunt to let me take you two girls a little trip, anywhere you would like to go. But I guess we will all stay at home instead, and—*move!*"

"Good-morning, Miss Newby," and Jim took off his hat as a young lady passed them—a tall, young lady, with a brown hat and a striped Paisley shawl.

"Bless me!" said Nan, "you do seem at home in this region. Who is that?"

"Wait here a moment," answered Jim, depositing Nan in a small shop, and following with rapid steps in the direction Miss Newby had taken.

"And these are our new neighbours," thought

Nan, as she looked around the squalid shop, where red herrings and papers of mint-drops combined in attractiveness with rows of pins and a box of cheap cigars.

The new houses that Mr. Oldfield had spoken of were directly opposite. Nan could see them through the open door. Cheap little houses, with steps of white painted wood, and the door opening suddenly into the one front room. Nan's enthusiasm sank in these new surroundings as she watched a woman, with an apron over her head, waiting with her blue bowl for the milkman, who drove up just then in his rattling cart. The milk was served, and the woman chatted with the milkman, stopping to shake and push back a child who was peeping out at her side.

"Whatever can have come to Jim?" and Nan rose from the stool where Jim had placed her, and looked down the street. There he was, just raising his hat as he left Miss Newby and came towards her, walking very fast.

"Who is Miss Newby?" she asked impatiently, as they crossed the street together, and stood on the house-step, waiting for the key from the next door.

"Oh, she is a telegraph operator."

"A woman!" said Nan.

"Yes, and a real splendid girl she is too. She used to have the office up at Greene Station, that's how I came to know her; and they thought her such a good hand that they moved her down here. She will be married in the fall," he added, with a careless look at Nan.

And Nan gazed after Miss Newby's retreating figure with a new interest.

"See there," said Jim, turning her round, "over there in the depot, where you see the white and green window, there's her office. When you come to live up here I'll send a '*Howdy?*' by her sometimes. It will be quite handy." The house was inspected.

"Cheap and hungry," Jim pronounced it.

"I don't care," said Nan, "the cheap is what we want, and as for the hungry, come and see"—with a faint echo of her old defiance. Were they coming up here to be hungry? Not while there was a picture to be sold in B.!

Returning, they again met Miss Newby on her way back to her office with a paper of lunch in her hand.

Mother Norris' money to good purpose when you bought it. It's worth fully that to-day."

"Goodness, Margaret, how you swoop down on me with your plans. One would think you had been planning all winter to have me helpless. What makes you know so much about real estate to-night?"

Planning! Every day of Margaret Norris' life, since her husband's illness, had been a plan, an anxious forecasting of the future. What had she not thought and schemed in her anxious beating against the bars of poverty closing in?

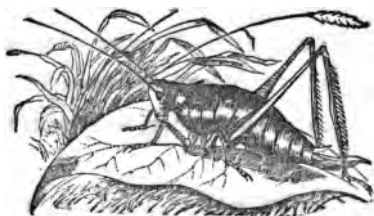
But she simply answered,—

"I met Mr. Oldfield, the conveyancer, to-day in the street, and he stopped to ask after you. 'Great rise in property, ma'am, in your neighbourhood. You are the court-end of the town now. Your house, with the fine old garden, ought to fetch eight thousand at the very least.'"

"That's five hundred a year," said her husband. "How could you manage to live on that? Don't talk nonsense, Margaret."

"Oh, with the girls' help in a little time; and we will borrow a few hundreds from our capital to start with. It will all come out right, trust to me."

How glad Mrs. Norris was that she had given the door-key to Nan. It was her custom to sit up for the girls always, if they were away in the evening from home. But to-night she had arranged for them to take the key, lest father should be disturbed in his restless sleep. She bolted her door now, that no sight nor sound of the bright young things might come to her; and Delia, in the nursery above, had already mounted her post.





CHAPTER V.

HOME-HUNTING.

THE next morning after breakfast Margaret Norris opened her heart to her daughters. Cousin Jim had taken out the boys for a walk, and the conclave was uninterrupted, save by baby's unconscious talk.

Nan was all excitement for the new plans. She scarce dwelt on the dark cause of it all—they had grown so used to father's failing sight that, perhaps for them, as for their mother, the crisis was scarcely a shock.

"Isn't it lucky, mother, I am on my last shirt to day? I'll finish it right off, and then we'll begin to pack."

"We must find a place to move to first, Nan."

"Well, the minute that Jim comes back, I'll make him go with me up town and find a house."

"Or half a house. You can't sew and hunt houses at the same time, Nan. But I must go to Mr. Oldfield at once."

"If Jim would only come!" said Nan, watching her mother from the window.

Her father still slept on in the next room, worn out with the excitement of the night before.

"Can't you sew, Nan, while you are waiting? I must go to Miss Brown and ask her to excuse me for to-day. Though I can't do that either, for she asked me to teach the youngest class their arithmetic," said poor Hetty sighing.

"You poor thing! I shall never go near school again, my mind is made up on that!" and Nan rummaged in her workbox for her thimble.

"But, Nan, we must do something, both of us. Mother is willing now."

"Yes, I know," nodded Nan, keeping her eyes steadily fixed on her sewing. "*Isn't* this the last dreadful shirt, and *won't* I begin with my drawing to-morrow? And then," a smile overflowing her face, "in a year I shall be taking portraits—you will see—and making lots of money!"

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But Jim had left no address. Such a rover as he was, with his seven-league boots and his magic chain, they could only hope to reach him by leaving a letter for him at the railway depôt, in the superintendent's charge.

In all this excitement Nan said nothing. Her colour rose when the matter was discussed, but she went on drawing nails and opening boxes as if for a wager.

"Leave all till morning," Mrs. Norris urged, but Nan was overflowing with activity; her hands and feet seemed to make amends for the unwonted silence of her tongue. Only when Hetty asked if anybody knew where the inkstand had been packed Nan flew into a pet.

"I should think you had better be helping, Hetty Norris, instead of writing nonsensical letters in such heaps as this."

"I don't see any heaps," said Hetty, looking around the neat kitchen, "except in the parlour, and there is no need to touch that till morning. You had much better rest. I am going to."

But Nan could not rest, it seemed. She still tramped about the room, and made a great deal

of noise with the hammer and nails; and when the letter lay folded and sealed on the table she said,—

“Mother, if Delia may come with me, I will take it over to the depot.”

“Not to-night, dear. It is too late for you to go out in this new neighbourhood.”

“It is only a step, mother, and no one is about,” pleaded Nan. “Besides, it may have a chance to go to Jim by the midnight mail.”

“I’ll go with you, daughter,” said John Norris, who could not bear that Nan should be disappointed in anything she had set her heart on.

So Nan put on her father’s hat, and out they went into the dark street. It was but partly paved as yet, and there were piles of bricks and rubbish in their path; but Nan skilfully led her father round them, and stood by him quietly as he laid the letter on the superintendent’s desk.

The depot was deserted. Some conductors’ lanterns, one white and two red ones, lay on a bench outside. One or two small boys lounged round, whistling, that was all.

At the green and white window Jim had pointed

out Nan stopped and peeped in. "I want to see something, father," she explained. There was a bright light inside, and Nan went close up to the window and looked in.

There was no Miss Newby there, but a bearded man, gray-haired and bent, sat at the table, copying something into a large book, while the *tat-tat* of the little instrument went on ceaselessly. It was the night operator, and Miss Newby had gone home. With a sigh of relief Nan seized her father's arm and walked rapidly away.

The next morning, true to her word, she dusted and arranged furniture and books with great industry, and at half-past nine she came downstairs with hat and sacque in hand.

"Mother, please save me a bit of dinner. I shall draw till two. The parlour looks very well already, and I'll put on the finishing touches this afternoon. Don't touch the china barrel, please, till I come home. It will just break your back, and Delia has plenty out for the dinner-table."

Nan went off, humming a gay tune, but secretly ill at ease. She could not put by a haunting thought; and strangely enough it was connected with Jim.

"I wonder if he meant anything," she said, stopping short as she crossed Maple Street. "He didn't seem to."

Mr. Arnold received her with acclamation as a pupil worth having, and set her down to her first lesson with immense satisfaction.

All the while in the shop below the strange boy, Leonardo da Vinci Arnold, whom his father called Leonard, kept up a whirring of wheels and a "tackin," as Delia had said. But the old woman brought her up a plate of brown rusks, and begged her to eat quite kindly, as it was surely hungry work.

Two o'clock—Nan had not calculated for her first enthusiasm—three, four passed. And still she was working away. Mr. Arnold came and went; and there was one sitter, a fat lady in a velvet gown, who went away, with a flourish and a nod to Nan, down stairs to her carriage. But Nan, though her head was hot, and her feet were ice, never thought how time was flying.

At last something darkened the room suddenly, and looking up, she saw that Mr. Arnold had dropped a heavy green shade over the large north window behind her.

"I beg pardon," she said jumping up. "Oh, I have stayed too long. This makes two lessons, don't it?"

"Nonsense. I have to drive you away because it is not good for you to sit still any longer. This is only number one."

He praised the work, and seemed in high good humour at her earnestness.

But Nan flew home. "They will think it so strange," she said, as she hurried along.

But her father alone was fidgeting. Mrs. Norris knew Nan too well to be worried, and seemed in entire sympathy with her excuses and ecstasies.

But the cold feet were still cold, the head still hot at bed-time, and Nan tossed through the night, wrestling with an evil dream.

"I am the very opposite of father," she said gayly to Hetty next morning, as they had their sisterly confidences over the hair-brushes; all my troubles come on at night. I thought last night that I should never draw another line, I had such another—*drawing*," with a queer chuckle at her own secret pun. "But this morning, fal la la—I wouldn't do anything else in the world."

Again Nan started, with her portfolio for company, but on this day she left the studio promptly as the clock struck two. She spent the entire afternoon over Bobby's striped stockings, darning in a bit of red, and here a stripe of white. Soon after supper she went to bed, saying she had slept but little the night before.

"That does not seem to help any," thought Hetty, as her sister started and tossed through the long night. "Are you ill, Nan? Shall I get you anything?"

"Oh, no, I shall be all right by morning," and the tired Hetty soon fell fast asleep.

Not so Nan. She got up with stealthy step, and catching up a water-proof cloak from a chair—still Nan's wardrobe, the greater part of it reposed on chairs—she went to the window and looked out.

The lights of the depot were shining in the near distance; and a train was going out, with an unearthly shriek of defiance, that sounded to Nan like a jeering cry. The long lines of the telegraph-poles shone out white in the moonlight; they seemed to stretch out into some vague, horrible future, and to fascinate her gaze.

Suddenly she shut down the window with a bang, and made one spring into bed. The easel, the old easel of yellow pine, which stood by her bedside, rocked with the rapid movement, and tottered, then fell back against the wall.

"Poor old thing! I'll settle you in the morning!"

"What is that chopping down cellar?" asked Mrs. Norris next morning.

"It is Miss Nan, mem, choppin' up kindlin' wood. She got up before any one in the house, but she had to wait till I kem down for the hatchit."

"What started you so early this morning, daughter?" as Nan came up from the cellar, with her apron full of pine splinters, and threw them into Delia's basket.

Nan, all flushed with the unwonted exercise, and with a strange glitter in her eyes, came up behind her mother and kissed her. "I was trying to be useful, marmsey."

It was seldom that she used Hetty's pet word, and Mrs. Norris looked up with a pleased smile.

"You are in a great hurry, Nan, this morning," said Hetty, as Nan snatched away her coffee-cup the moment she set it down.

"Yes, I am."

The result of this expedition was a much earlier start than usual; and Nan set off, at nine o'clock, with no portfolio under her arm.

Arrived at the shop for "Colours & Artists' Materials," she found Mr. Arnold perched on a ladder, putting something to rights on a high shelf. Nan seated herself by the low counter, and waited until he came down the ladder, dusting his hands together. She gave him no time to question.

"Mr. Arnold, don't think me changeable or fickle, but I must give up drawing!"

"Give up drawing! after your fine start on that head?" said the artist, looking at her as though she had suddenly gone daft.

"Yes. You know how poor we are—you know about father?" Mr. Arnold waved his hand as though she need not explain. "Well, everybody is doing something; at least, Hetty is, and I know I am a burden where I ought to help. Could Leonard, your son, teach me to telegraph? My Cousin Jim is on that railroad, and I think he could get me a place."

The strange boy had come out of his den on hear-

ing his name, and now stood leaning with his two palms on the counter, and looking at Nan with a puzzled scrutiny.

"Don't think me ungrateful, Mr. Arnold, for your kindness; and maybe I have not a right to many lessons more? *How many is a set?*" she asked, turning to the artist with a sudden flash of recollection.

"Ask Leonard," he said with a strange smile.

"But oh!" Nan went on, "I will try ever so hard; I think I can learn, for I have a good ear, and I can write fast."

"Settle it with Leonard," said Mr. Arnold abruptly, opening the door which led upstairs.

But Nan pursued him to the lower step.

"You are not angry, Mr. Arnold? If you knew how I felt when I chopped up my easel this morning, you would know that I do love it."

"Chopped up *what*? you strange child!"

"My old easel. I could not bear to look at it standing there in the corner of the room, and I got it out of the way. When I am rich I will buy another, for I do mean to work at it some day, only not just now."

"No, I am not angry," said Mr. Arnold. "I was going upstairs to put away your model."

Nan's face fell. That was the end then. She gazed disconsolately at the floor.

But Leonard, who seemed more of a gentleman this morning than in their previous meetings, was holding the door open for her to enter his workshop.

"I'll be very glad to teach you, I am sure," he said. "I like it better than upstairs. I never could do anything up there, you know."

"I could," said Nan, with resolution, as she followed her misshapen guide across the dingy threshold of his room, "but I mean to do something here too."





CHAPTER VII.

CHAMOMILE STREET.

IT was a cozy little home after all, May Jamieson thought, as she stepped daintily in through the front door. Though the Norrises had moved "away up among the brick yards," Madam Jamieson had insisted that the acquaintance should not be dropped. May could depend on having her own way in most things. Ever since she had been brought a child two years old with her South American nurse, from Rio Janeiro, where her father and mother had both died of the fever, she had discovered that to scream very loud, and grow quite stiff and purple with holding her breath, was the way to get whatever she wanted from her indulgent grandmother. Now that she was past the screaming age, a fit of the sulks was often quite as useful in carrying her point. In Madam Jamieson was an easy old lady, who liked to see happy

faces around her; and the easiest way, she thought, was to say "yes" always, whenever May or the servants asked for a special indulgence.

On the night of May's last party, Madam Jamieson had come to the conclusion that the Norrises were the best bred girls in the room. It was not merely that Hetty had talked to some shy, gawky, country boys, whom all the rest of the girls laughed at, and whom May Jamieson turned her back upon. They were cousins of hers on their first visit to B——, but that was no reason, the young lady argued, that she should make herself uncomfortable with trying to entertain them. It was not merely that Nan had given up her own place in the set, because May Jamieson had crowded in front of her with her partner, and had walked quietly over into the corner, and looked at photographs till the dance was over, not showing any annoyance. It was the whole manner of both the girls, so refined and gentle, so courteous to young and old.

"They think of other people first, that is evident," said Madam Jamieson, talking over her guests with May, who sat surveying herself in the long mirror opposite. "If I were talking to *them* now, I believe

that they would look at *me*, and listen with their eyes as well as their ears. May, you *look* like a lady, but I am afraid that is all there is of it."

So Madam Jamieson had been very attentive to the Norrises, and now that May had returned from Newport, had sent her up to call at the little house in Chamomile Street.

It was a lovely afternoon, late in September, quite like a summer's day, and the whole population of the little street was sitting on doorsteps, or at the open windows. Babies were being dragged in little wag-gons on the side walk, and some boys were flying kite in the middle of the street. If mischievous Nan had desired to introduce "our neighbours" to May Jamieson, there could not have been a better opportunity.

With an expression of great disgust, and her pretty nose uplifted high in air, May rang the bell at No. 9. If she had been a dear lover of babies, as Hetty was, she would have discovered that these little urchins were scrupulously clean, and as well behaved, at least, as the ruffled and curled darlings of Magnolia Square, that her own windows looked out upon.

Delia opened the door, and beamed with delight

upon the beautifully dressed young lady. "Yes, Miss Hetty was in."

May seated herself on the drab moreen-covered sofa, and looked rapidly around her. The room was tiny, very, after the large square parlour in Maple Street, and was a mere box compared to the Jamieson drawing-room. But it was a pretty box enough, even the scornful young lady confessed to herself. Some low book shelves occupied one side of the room, a bust of Apollo on the top shelf. The one broad window, where the western sun shone in, was filled with geraniums and roses. There was a drab carpet, "only ingrain, I declare," said May, under her breath, "but it's real pretty." The mantle shelf was draped with blue, and in front of the old-fashioned mirror were some nodding ferns in a tall glass. There was a blue cloth on the table, in the centre of which stood a student's lamp, while a little workbasket, some books, and a magazine marked "Library," lay upon it. In front of the sofa was a shaggy mat of soft pale blue. May was stooping to examine it as Hetty entered, and nothing abashed, said as she rose—

"Hetty, how in the world did you get this crinkle

in your rug? I have knitted a scarlet one, but it will be nothing but stiff loops."

"Oh," laughed Hetty, "if you had seen the old blue Afghan that rug was made of, before it was ravelled up, you wouldn't ask how the crinkle came. It was all dropping to pieces, it had been washed so often, but it makes a very decent rug, and Nan was saying only yesterday that it had faded to just the right shade."

"Very pretty," said May, straightening herself, and remembering the object of her visit. "Hetty, there is to be a fair for the children's hospital, you know. The week before Christmas, grandma says we may have it, and the girls are all going to meet at our house once a week to make things for it. We are all to have tables, and manage it all ourselves, without any grown people doing a thing. Grandma thought you would like to meet us, and—if you could take a table"——

"Thank you," said Hetty decidedly, "I am sure we would like to help, but we would not be able to fill a table; we have so little time, you see. It is very kind of Mrs. Jamieson to think of us, but we will have to say no."

"So I told grandma," May began, but stopped suddenly. It was not very polite, she remembered, to have calculated thus closely about the Norrises. And it sounded quite ungracious, as though she did not want them to join the "Busy Bees."

May Jamieson rated her friends by their lockets and flounces. She had always despised the simply-dressed Norrises; and as she surveyed Hetty from head to foot now, she thought, "I don't believe they have a thing to wear!"

"You need not mind about dress, you know, Hetty. We are to wear our school dresses; grandma settled that when we talked it over."

"I was not thinking about the dress. If I wanted to work for the hospital, I could do it as well in calico as in silk."

"Oh! that sounds exactly like Nan. Where is she, Hetty? I hear she is learning some kind of black work—type-setting, is it?—in Arnold's back shop."

"Here she is," said Hetty, as a tall figure passed the window, and came lightly up the steps. Nan opened the door with a key, and came in radiant. She had grown very much during the summer; and

the steady work, the feeling, she expressed it, of 'ground under her feet,' had brought quite a new look into her face. Her colour was bright, and her eyebrows were no longer raised in discontent with all the world.

Even May Jamieson had to admit that Nan looked very pretty indeed in her little black hat and dark-blue muslin dress. While she was shaking hands with Nan, she took in every item of her toilet, from the blue cravat at her throat to her dark dogskin glove. "Very well dressed, indeed," and May was a judge.

"Busy Bees?" said Nan, smiling as she held out her hand to her visitor. "Oh, I know all about it. I walked up the street with Belle and Fanny, and they told me I should find you here."

"Yes," said May with a somewhat pompous air, "but I am sorry that Hetty declined for you."

"Nonsense!" said Nan; "I've accepted. Hetty, you bad child, we shall have a table the prettiest in the room. Yes. Don't say one word. We will come, May, and do everything that we can. Don't I pass the hospital every day, and see all the poor little lame things helped down to sit in the sun?"

Hetty Norris, I am ashamed of you—to be so unfeeling! I'll have to take you by there to-morrow!"

"Well, settle it between you," said May sharply, as though she had been better satisfied with Hetty's refusal. "It is growing dark, and I must go."

"What did you say yes for?" exclaimed Hetty, as the door closed upon May. "We have not an earthly thing to put on the table; no time to make mats and tidies; and no money to buy wools and stuffs with. It will be ridiculous. A bare table, with two Miss Norrises blandly smiling behind it."

"Oh," called out Nan, opening the door again, and running out into the street after May. "I forgot, May, to tell you that we will come to your evenings sometimes, but the work for our table must be done at home."

"I declare, Nan, you are quite a puzzle to-night. What do you mean?" asked Hetty, as Nan came back breathless into the room.

"Mean? You darling, best child in the world," seizing Hetty round the waist, and whirling her about the tiny parlour. "Mean? Isn't it part of the contract? You buy my gloves and cravats and

pretty things, and I keep the world off of you—that is, I fight May Jamieson for you. I settled it in a minute, as soon as I heard of the fair, what we would do, for of course we must do something for those dear little things. And I mean to keep it a profound secret from all the girls till the very day of the fair. There won't be another table like ours, you may be sure of that!"





CHAPTER VIII.

THE ONLY BOY.

A CHORUS of giggles! Mrs. Jamieson's drawing-room, with its tinkling chandeliers, heavy with crystal drops, its amber satin sofas, the smooth mirrors from floor to ceiling, its grand piano in the centre of the room. On the piano-stool a boy of sixteen, whirling to and fro.

This was the first meeting of the "Busy Bees," and they were in full buzz over Berlin wools, crotched mats, embroidered slippers, wax flowers, and the dozens of pretty nothings that go to fill up the tables of a fair. May held up for inspection from time to time a shawl-strap, on which the words "*Bon voyage*" were rapidly taking shape in letters of golden brown.

The young gentleman at the piano was the only boy in the room, and was evidently enjoying himself

very much indeed. By the rules of the "Busy Bees," "brothers" were not to be admitted until nine o'clock. The "Bees" met at seven, and two hours were supposed to be spent in hard work, until the entrance of the boys should give the signal for much confusion of tongues and stitches.

Ned Parker, the boy at the piano, was brother to Dr. Parker, the young surgeon in charge of the children's hospital, and had been specially invited by Mrs. Jamieson to talk to the girls. All his time out of college he spent in the hospital wards. He had some "pet cases" there, as he called them, and sharing his brother's passion for his work, every one prophesied that he would make a great doctor one of these days.

Madam Jamieson had taken a great fancy to him ever since the day she had met him in Oak Street, carrying in his arms a poor, pale little boy.

"Where are you going?" she had asked. "It is young Master Parker, isn't it?"

Ned strove to set free his hand, that he might take off his hat to the stately old lady.

"Never mind your hat," said madam pleasantly;

"your hands are better employed. But who is this?"

"This is Tony. One of my brother's cases." Ned was nothing if not professional.

"And where are you going with Tony?"

"Oh, over here to the base-ball grounds. Tony has never seen a match, and I promised to take him over to-day. The doctor hurt him yesterday a good deal, didn't he, Tony? But he is all right now." -

And with as graceful a bow as circumstances would allow, Ned hurried away with his clinging little burden.

There were tears in madam's eyes as she looked after them.

"That boy will make something," she said softly.

She had ordered her carriage to meet her at Ermine's, the great silk shop; and as it drew up now, with its prancing black horses and glittering gilt harness, she said, stepping in—

"Drive out to G. Street, Thomas, to the children's hospital."

"I take shame to myself, Dr. Parker, for never

having been here before," said Madam Jamieson to the young doctor, who came out of his office to meet her in the hall. "A little missionary sent me here this afternoon, however, and I want to hear all about Tony."

"Oh, you must have met Ned, then. He meant to take Tony over to the ball grounds by the side lanes. But Tony had never seen a shop window, nor the street cars, and I believe Ned concluded at last that he would brave the crowd on Oak Street, and let the little fellow see all that he could. He promised Tony yesterday, if he would submit to be hurt, he should have a good time to-day."

"And where does Tony come from?"

"Ned found him one day in a damp cellar in Coombs' Alley, I believe," said the young doctor, laughing. "That boy has a very genius for deformity,—just as some people have an ear for music. He has an eye for all the poor little cripples in town. Ever since our hospital started, Ned has been on the lookout for patients. He found Tony in a cellar so damp that the walls were dripping; a cellar in a court, too, where pre-

cious little light came into the rooms above ground even.

"Tony was born there, I believe, and had never been out of it, his mother said, for he had been a little cripple always. His father had run away, and I guess the woman drank a good deal. She went out begging, I know, and Tony was all alone and crying when Ned first found him.

"Poor little chap! When Ned brought him a flower he didn't know what it was. Wanted to eat it, I believe. Never had seen a tree or the sky even. I wonder how he has lived so long in that little hole!

"Ned had hard work to persuade the mother to bring him to the hospital; but one Sunday night, when it was too dark for the neighbours to see, she brought him here, wrapped in a thin cotton gown, much too short for his poor little legs. She has disappeared since then, so I guess she don't care much about him now he is off her hands.

"But that was three months ago; and though the little chap will never be well, he is comfortable, as you saw. Ned has been begging for him among the

schoolboys, and got him fitted out with that suit of clothes he wore to-day.

"But you must walk through our wards," said the courteous doctor, interrupting himself. "I think you will be interested in some of our little folks."

Madam Jamieson did more than walk through the wards on that day. The pitiful pale faces touched her heart, and she "took hold" of the work from that very hour. Very frequently now her carriage stood at the hospital gate. Sometimes there was a large basket, that smelt very good indeed, handed out; sometimes an envelope for the doctor with a banknote inside; always, of a fair day, the carriage stood there until it was filled with little pale faces, and Thomas was ordered to drive very gently, indeed, out to the beautiful park, where the carriage would be unpacked, and go back for another load.

"I love to think of the Master's work among the sick, the lowly, and the forgotten," said the madam.

May and her friends, too, had caught enough of the spirit of those joyful rides to want to do something more. Was not that delightful Ned Parker

coming constantly to Madam Jamieson's now, talking to her quite as freely as though she had been his aunt, though he was rather shy of May? He did not know much about girls,—he had no sisters of his own; but with the gracious, beautiful old lady, he was quite at his ease. She consulted him about her hospital pets, not always the same as his, and made him feel quite proud, and as though he was really a help to her.

The girls were all wild with the excitement of the fair; and Madam Jamieson was beset night and day to say that it might be.

"I don't believe in fairs at all," she said; "I don't like them. But if this will only give you all an interest in the poor sick children, and perhaps remind some other people to think of them, I am willing you should have an affair for the Christmas week. But you must promise me to do one thing first."

Of course they all promised headlong.

"You must each of you make up one article for the children, a little wrapper or nightgown or hem a pair of small sheets for the little beds."

The faces grew somewhat longer at this; but with the delights of the fair in prospect, the Christmas

green and the flags, and all the beautiful work, of course the promise was kept. Then Madam Jamieson, well pleased, had called them her "Busy Bees," as the neat, tiny garments were piled up, one by one, on the library table, and the society was formed with due ceremony.

"Put down," said the old lady, while the names were being written in May's tall, sloping handwriting, in a business-like blank book, "put down Nan and Hetty Norris."

May pouted.

"Grandma! they have not done anything."

"No matter, my dear, put them down. I especially insist on having them. And I have my own good reasons, which might have occurred to you too, for not asking them to do this work in advance. They are 'Busy Bees' already; but you," looking down on May's fingers sparkling with rings, "had to prove your right to the name."

On the evening of May's visit to the Norrises, a note had come to Madam Jamieson from Nan, a very delightful note the old lady said. Nan wrote very frankly that her sister's preparations and her own must be carried on at home. They would be glad to

join the "Busy Bees," however, in their evenings at her house, if Mrs. Jamieson could give them some work, either for the hospital or fair, to keep their hands busy. Thereunto Nan added a suggestion or two of her mother's, that made the old lady laugh heartily and say, "Capital! A capital idea!"





CHAPTER IX.

TWO YOUNG SAMARITANS.

MADAM JAMIESON answered Nan's note the next day. The next was set for the first meeting of the "Busy Bees." Thus they were all assembled in the drawing-room, all except the Norrises, who had been shown upstairs to Madam Jamieson's library. Before the girls had assembled a servant had carried in a large covered basket, which he had placed carefully in front of madam's favourite sofa; saying to the wondering May, "It is madam's fair work, she bid me say."

May did not dare to peep in; and the arrival of the "Bees," one after another, had fully occupied her until now. Ned Parker, with some embarrassment, had just come in, and had taken, in his confusion, the first seat that presented itself by the open piano. One boy among so many girls! It was rather awk-

ward. He wished Madam Jamieson had not invited him ; at least not until the other boys were admitted. He wished himself at home with that half prepared Greek exercise for to-morrow,—anywhere, anything, rather than among all those pretty girls.

But May was equal to the occasion. She had her grandmother's easy way of entertaining. So she quietly asked Ned to look over some copies of *Punch* that lay on the piano until grandma should find him something to do.

So Ned, thus studied, though he did swing round on the piano stool occasionally, found his balance again.

"Here's a droll poem, Miss May,—very clever," he said, looking up from *Punch*. "Shall I read it you?"

Indeed it seemed the only sensible thing to do with his eyes and tongue, now that he had found his head again.

"We shall be delighted, I am sure," said May, looking round among the smiling girls. "We will work all the better for it."

So the poem from *Punch* was about ending, amid giggles from the busy circle, when the door opened

and Madam Jamieson walked in, with Hetty and Nan following.

How the cool gray poplin, the desire of Nan's heart, had been found at last, perhaps Hetty's little private account book could tell. She was to spend her school salary all on herself, her mother said; which, being interpreted by the loving Hetty, meant on herself and Nan.

"Dear Nan shall wear the colours she likes for once," resolved Miss Hetty; "it does hurt her so to dress in dingy stuffs." So the two cool gray poplins were bought, and Nan's was lighted up, as she had promised herself, with a flash of scarlet velvet in her hair.

It was quite a reception for Nan and Hetty, for the girls all rose and crowded round them, so that they seemed to be the guests of the evening, as perhaps Madam Jamieson had planned.

"Come here, Edward Parker," she said, "and be introduced to these young ladies."

Ned came bravely up, with a polite bow to Miss Norris; but, as Hetty's name was mentioned, a mischievous look of recognition came into his eyes, which seemed to say, "Is it you?" While Hetty, usually

so quiet and demure, blushed rosy amid her blue ribbons.

"They know each other," thought May, who was jealously watching the group. "Where could he have met that quiet Hetty Norris, who never goes anywhere?"

"Now, young people," said Madam Jamieson, "I am going to show you *my* work," as she seated herself on the sofa.

"May, my dear, take off the lid from this basket. I hope you have not been peeping, any of you."

The girls gathered round, as May snatched off the lid, and disclosed a tangled heap of bright-coloured cloths.

"Carpet rags!" said Ned with a laugh.

"You wonderful boy! How should you know?" cried they all.

"Oh, I've often seen rag-carpets made at home; and it was only last night I heard somebody say one was needed at the hospital."

"Nan and Hetty, I will ask you to help me. Since your pretty preparations for the fair must be made at home, and cannot be carried backwards and for-

wards, I shall have your good help, I hope, with mine. If you do double work, the hospital must give you double thanks."

"Surely I can work at that too," said Ned, as the girls took out their shining scissors. "Let me cut something, won't you?" to Nan.

But Ned's help was only a pretext, it seemed, for lingering near that sofa. Instead of the long, smooth ribbons that fell fast from the hands of Madam Jamieson and the girls, he snipped one particular bit of crimson cloth into tiny wafers that fell all over the carpet, until madam threatened him with instant dismissal unless he put the scissors down.

So he contented himself with rolling up the ball that was growing fast under Hetty's fingers. Hetty was joining the strips together with a few stitches of bright thread, and Ned busied himself in handing her the most showy contrasting rags that the basket afforded.

Watching his chance when May Jamieson had at last moved away to the other side of the room, he said in low tones, and with the same look of mischief in his eyes—

"Did he get well?"

"No, he died," answered Hetty mysteriously, trying to keep back a smile.

"I thought he would," responded Ned.

Whereupon they both laughed.

But lest you should think that Ned and Hetty were making merry over solemn things, we must go back two full years, and see Miss Hetty, on a Sunday morning, arrayed in her best suit of pearl-coloured cashmere, on her way to church.

It was a bleak, raw morning in early December, the ground frozen hard, and a pitiless sky looking down on the quiet town. It was late. The church-bells had just given their final clang, and Hetty was in a hurry.

At one of the crossings—on Oak Street it was—she came suddenly upon an ugly yellow dog, stretched out upon the stones, and moaning most pitifully.

Hetty was a rare lover of dogs—anything canine had a claim on her. So she stooped and patted the dog, who gave a feeble little tap of his tail on the pavement.

"Up! up!" said Hetty, trying to make him move. But the poor thing did not stir—he was evidently much hurt. So Miss Hetty, fully aroused, took off

her precious pearl gloves, her carefully-saved best pair, and put them away in her pocket. Then she lifted the great dog in her arms, and made the best of her way home, through some by-streets, where she was sure to meet no one. He was a dreadfully heavy dog, and as she panted along under his weight, she was thankful that everybody was safe in church.

But, woful chance ! Just as she turned into Maple Street, and was nearing her own door, who should come up behind her but a very good-looking boy ; a fair-haired, English-looking fellow, who stared at her in a very rude way, Hetty thought, as he passed her.

Poor Hetty ! Her dress was stained with the muddy paws, her face was hot and red, for the yellow dog was heavy as lead ; her hat was falling upon her shoulders, and she had lost a ribbon from her hair. She was immensely provoked that the boy, instead of going on, stood still, and with a low bow opened the gate for her.

To no one, not even to Nan, did she tell the whole adventure of the morning, though the family laughed heartily at Hetty's "foundling." The poor yellow

dog grew worse and worse, howling so outrageously two livelong nights, that John Norris declared he would have him shot to put him out of his misery, and the family as well. Moreover, Miss Hetty was discovered at midnight stealing down to the kitchen-shed to pat and soothe him. On the third day, however, they found him stretched out and dead; and it was some little comfort to Hetty that the plate of broken meats that she had put beside him the night before was clean eaten up and gone.

But what was matter for crying then seemed something to laugh at now; and all through the evening, as Ned was carried off by May to talk to this girl and that, his eyes looked smilingly across the room, where Hetty sat and sewed demurely.

At half-past nine Delia Doran had orders to call for her young ladies. From nine o'clock there was an incessant pealing of the hall bell, and as the parlour began to fill up, Hetty beckoned Nan aside.

"Nan, do go and say good-night quietly to Madam Jamieson. I have; and Delia will be here in a minute."

"Why not wait till she comes?" said candid Nan,

who was enjoying herself hugely with quite a little circle of boys around her. But Hetty had already slipped away, and was waiting, ready shawled and gloved, long before Nan made her appearance in the dressing-room.

"What ails you, Hetty, to be in such a hurry? It seems hardly civil to Madam Jamieson."

"Very likely it is all a notion; but I was afraid one of those bothering boys would offer to come home with us."

"Well, suppose they did? If that Edward Barker — Parker, what is his name? had asked to take me home, I should have been only too delighted."

"Nan," said Hetty, in the cozy talk over the hair brushing, in which these two maidens, in their dressing sacques, spent a great deal of time every night, "I wish I was as honest as you! It was because I really did want that Parker boy to come home with us, and because I was sure he wanted to, that I ran away."





CHAPTER X.

THE MUSIC OF THE WIRES.

THE next morning as the Norris family sat at breakfast, a heavy rolling barrow stopped before the door, followed by a sharp ring of the bell.

"One of the railroad barrows, I know the sound of them," said Nan jumping up. "Perhaps it is Jim's trunk!"

But Delia, returning from the open door, announced, "A bar'l, mem, of meapel surrop."

"All the way from Greene County," cried Nan, taking the card from Delia's hand. "It is from Jim, mother, I thought so. He has sent us lots of things, and oh! maple syrup! Joyful!"

For Nan had a sweet tooth, as what girl of sixteen has not?

"Apples, too!" cried the boys. "And bags of nuts!"

It was indeed a generous supply from the wild-cat county, where Jim reigned supreme over miles of new road. There was a general jubilee as the good, homely kegs and boxes were rolled one by one into the kitchen.

"Now I can have *my* party," said Nan. "I thought last night while we were all sitting up so stately in Madam Jamieson's parlour what fun a real candy-pulling would be, such as we used to have when we were little girls, mother, when Belle and Fanny came to tea, and we were mercifully given the kitchen to ourselves afterwards."

"It would make a variety certainly," said Hetty. "and here are thousands of nuts."

"Isn't it splendid? We'll let the boys crack them, and save our fingers. Each boy to bring a hammer, and each girl a white apron. What jolly fun! Let's invite Ned Parker and all the 'Busy Bees,' with a side glance at Hetty. "He can set the pans out on the grass-plot to cool."

"Please don't have it this week," pleaded Hetty, taking a large packet of theme-books from the parlour book-shelf. "This is examination week, and I shall have to work every evening over these

papers. I thought maybe you would help me, Nan."

"You, poor child! I forgot," said Nan cheerily. "Of course we will wait. Are you ready, father dear?"

It had become John Norris' habit of late to walk down with Nan to her daily lesson. He took great interest in the telegraphy, and it was amusement for him to be with Leonard. The strange boy, so surly with the well-dressed and gay young ladies who came into the shop to admire a "perfectly lovely frame," or to turn over the portfolio of new French photographs, was gentle and almost reverent in his manner to the blind man.

They had many tastes in common. In his plodding, bookkeeper days, John Norris had never time or thought for aught besides columns of figures and bills of lading. He seemed now to be in another world as he listened to Leonard, who read to him in his thin, weak voice, the latest and freshest paper in his *Scientific Review*. Now it was to climb among Alpine snows, with the glorious avalanche thundering down across the valley; now to look upon a magic screen where crystals grew into shapes more lovely

and glowing than the gems in the "Arabian Nights." It was Aladdin's palace over again, John Norris thought, as with his closed and darkened eyes he saw the wonders grow.

In the careless, easy household of the Arnolds there seemed always plenty of money for the necessities of life. Indeed, people always do find money, it seems, for what they really *must* have. If the necessities of life mean to you a walking-suit trimmed in the newest fashion, you will be very likely to have it by the time winter comes, even though you should let the plate for the poor pass you by in church time and again.

If a good dinner is worth more to you than a good concert, your five-dollar bill will find its way to the market-stall fast enough. If the necessities of life are a fine carpet and curtains, your parlour will be gorgeous, though the book-shelves are empty on your walls.

So the Arnolds had the necessities of life too. There was no carpet on any floor in the house; old Beulah served up the baked beans in the shabbiest yellow ware, and poured out the coffee from a battered tin pot. But the father had his rare proof

engravings and fine photographs, which half the time he would keep for himself rather than sell again. And on Leonard's table, in his dingy back room, were piled up expensive books, and the new scientific pamphlets in French and German.

Since Nan had been coming daily to the Arnolds', there was a great change in Leonard. You would hardly have known him for the same boy. His shock of black hair, instead of falling wildly over his face and shoulders, was cut close, and showed a really handsome head. His linen was always scrupulously clean; Nan shuddered to think of the soiled shirtcuff that had pointed out to her the first mysteries of the telegraph. She had brought him shyly, at the end of the first week's lessons, a fresh cravat, made of a hoarded bit of black silk in her work-basket at home; and Leonard since then had discarded the limp and stained Solferino neck-tie that he had worn during the past year. Beulah, too, was becoming reconciled to the bright young lady, and no longer scowled at her from the back yard.

According to all calculations, the "set" of lessons was over long ago. But Miss Newby, whom Nan

had visited several times in her lonely quarters at the depot, had begged Nan still to go on with Leonard, and make herself perfect as possible. Miss Newby's marriage was put off till June, so she would be their friend and neighbour all the coming winter, and then perhaps—

Perhaps is the fairy's wand after all. In a twinkling, with that little word we can summon up a basket-phaeton that carries us away from these dull school-books and stiff French exercises out into the open country. Here is our home, the dearest cottage in the world, with its western windows, and its lawn sloping down to the sea. There is croquet on that lawn, there are ponies in that stable, there are cozy duos on that piano, there are joyous rambles on that beach. The future holds them all—perhaps!

So Nan worked away over the cabalistic characters until she mastered them, and made a key-board of every table and bureau in the house, telegraphing strange messages to herself. And finally, when Leonard had pronounced her perfect, she walked over to Miss Newby's office, and quite astonished her by reading off-hand the message that was

coming over the wires. It was settled then that Nan should apply for that place as soon as Miss Newby left it; and with Cousin Jim's interest, how could she fail? But every morning she kept up her practice with Leonard, and every afternoon she wrote and corrected under Miss Newby's eye.

"Shall we never have our candy-pulling, I wonder?" said Nan, some two weeks after Hetty's examination work was over; and then Mrs. Norris took a heavy cold, which made her quite ill and kept her upstairs. "She could not spare the time to be ill," she said, and worried a good deal about father and the boys, so that she did not grow better as soon as they desired.

"Dear marmsey," said Hetty, "forget us all, won't you? Let me bring you a 'Trollope' from the library, and read you to sleep."

Nan stayed at home all day, and Delia moved about very softly; still the bright flush in Mrs. Norris' face, still the feverish, restless nights continued.

"Mother must have a doctor," said Nan decidedly. But Mrs. Norris, remembering the long bills of her

husband's illness, seemed more and more restless at the mention of it.

"It would do her more harm than good, for it is only quiet and rest that she needs, and how can she have that if she *will* be worried?

"Still, something must be done," said the girls, in conclave over their tea-cups that evening. It was Delia's "evening out," and the sisters were busy over the wooden bowl of steaming hot water, and the fair crash towels that made "washing-up" a dainty work enough.

"I'll ask grandmother!" said Hetty suddenly.

It was quite a proverb in the family now this "asking grandmother." Hester Norris' old receipt-book, yellow with age, and scented with the sweet herbs dried here and there within its leaves, was Hetty's unfailing resource in all household difficulties. There were a few pages in the back of the book devoted to the curing of burns and chilblains, quinsy and ague.

Hetty had always skipped these as old-fashioned and useless; but now, with a new feeling of reverence for that all-knowing grandmother, she took down the

book and read—"The best cure for a cold is catnip-tea."

"*Catnip!* What is that? Catnip—nip; anything like turnip, I wonder? Some dreadful stuff, I expect?"

"Some kind of herb, I fancy," said Hetty; "let's go ask Mrs. Major."

Mrs. Major, the oracle of the neighbourhood, kept a small shop over the way. Indeed, it was the same shop in which Nan had waited impatient, while Jim talked with Miss Newby, on the day they came house-hunting into this wild and foreign region. Now the shop was a familiar object enough, and from thread, needles, to "country milk," Mrs. Major was authority to the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Major knew all about catnip and catnip-tea; and, duly armed with a large bunch of the pungent herb, Hetty crossed the street in triumph. Soon a strange aroma that was partly pleasant, partly not, as Nan said, rose up from the kitchen, and Hetty carried a steaming bowl carefully upstairs into the dimly-lighted room.

"Oh, catnip-tea!" said her father, who sat by his

wife's bedside. "I haven't smelt it since I was a boy! That *is* good."

And Mrs. Norris, who in her childhood had had old-fashioned "bringing-up" on herb-tea, smiled and said it made her young again. In half an hour she fell into the soundest, most refreshing sleep. She did not waken when the house was softly bolted and barred at bed-time, and the next morning marmsey pronounced herself almost well again.

"Well enough, Nan, for you to give your invitations for that candy-party. I am sure the nuts are dry enough by this time, and the syrup must be tired of waiting."





CHAPTER XI.

WITH A WOODEN SPOON.

AT the next meeting of the "Busy Bees"—there had been three or four in the meantime—Nan announced her project, and invited girls and boys with a reckless disregard of the small parlour at home.

"But the fun is to be in the kitchen," she said; so it did not make any difference. "They are all coming, and Ned Parker, too, is going to make a wooden spoon for the occasion."

Friday night came. They had fixed it for Friday because of Hetty's holiday the next day; so that she need not be "driven" to the last minute. For Hetty, so young a teacher, duly prepared each lesson that she taught her class, to be ready for any question that a knowing girl might spring upon her.

It was an early moonlight in December, and all the

little street lay in shadow as the "Busy Bees" turned down into it from the depot. But all within the house was light and warmth. A student's lamp threw its pearly light from the top of the bookshelf. The cheap gas-fixtures had been Nan's abhorrence, and she had not rested until this soft, pretty lamp had been hunted out from among their stores.

But the gas was burning, too, and the soft-coal fire, just lighted, sent up wild sheets of flame, dancing and flickering on the tiny hearth.

In the kitchen, which Nan threw open immediately, and where most of the party took their places, the range was a solid glow of heat; and two tall brass candlesticks on the table gave that delightful, mysterious light that little people, brought up by gas now-a-days, will never know. The kitchen door opened on the yard, which was bright in the moonlight; and a bench on the grass-plot was all ready to receive the fragrant pans.

The grand mysteries began. The boys, with their hammers, faithfully pounded away in one corner, where Delia had laid some bricks for their accommodation, and the girls divided their attention between picking out the meat from the nuts, and stirring away

at the pans, four goodly-sized pans, that were bubbling and fizzing on the range.

May Jamieson came late, bringing with her a parcel addressed to the Misses Norris.

"It was left at our house this afternoon," she said, "with a card from Ned Parker."

"Then he isn't coming," said Nan. "How provoking."

"Oh, yes, he hopes to come; but the card said he could not be here early, and he knew you would want the ladle to begin with."

Nan unwrapped paper after paper, tied with blue ribbons, and held up at last an enormous wooden spoon, neatly cut from white pine, with a handle a full yard in length. It was hailed with cheers, and, waving it round her head, the grand stir commenced.

May Jamieson had gone upstairs with Hetty to take off her wraps, and now appeared in the midst of the gay party dressed as for a ball.

"Goodness, May!" cries practical Nan, "keep away from here, do; and please get up on the top shelf, alongside of Apollo, else you will be ruined!"

Madam Jamieson had some friends to dine with her on that day, and had not seen her granddaughter's toilet before starting; and May, passionately fond of dress, had taken this opportunity to sport a pink silk, with ruffled overskirt, and some arbutus blossoms, in dainty French flowers, looping up her sleeves. She knew that the rest of the party were to wear their oldest dresses, and bring white aprons to the fray, and she had taken this opportunity to out-shine them all. Especially did she want to eclipse the pretty Norrises, hoping that Ned Parker would be there to see.

But there was a general laugh—they could not help it—at this dazzling figure coming in among the black pans and flushed faces around the fire.

"She ought to be put under a glass case," said one boy to another, and Nora Blake menaced her with a dripping spoon, causing May to retire with shrieks into the parlour again. Hetty took compassion on her, and went in there with her; and May condescended to play at the letter game that lay on the table. She was puzzling over "Œcumenical" most of the evening, settling her bracelets, and casting from time to time most satisfied glances at the glass over the fire,

the old-fashioned slanting glass that reflected the whole room.

She entertained Hetty in the intervals of guessing and arranging the letters with talk about the fair.

"Only two weeks more. Are you sure you will be ready?"

"I think so. We are nearly ready now."

"Well, it is very mysterious, and it is really smart of you; for a great many people I know are coming just to see what the secret is of the Norrises' table."

"We did not mean it for smartness, I am sure," said Hetty; "but it was Nan's own idea, and as it was very simple, she thought she would keep it to herself."

"There's a great fight, you know," said May, shuffling again the e's and i's of her letters in blank despair. "There is a great fight at the refreshment table. Nora Blake—don't you think there is something very common about her? she isn't at all refined—she insists on their having *pie*! She says she knows all the boys will eat quantities of it, and that it will pay. The others want to have just ice-cream and cake, and those lovely bon-bons, something ele-

gant, you know, but Nora insists, and she is the head of that table."

"Pie is good," said Hetty dreamily.

"Yes, it is good, but who wants to be seen eating pie?"

"Oh, as to that, there are people, you know, who don't like to be seen eating anything. Between mince pie and fruit cake I don't think there is much difference, do you?"

"Nora says," said May, with a shrug she had got to perfection, "that the pies will be given us by everybody, while we shall have to pay lots for the ice-cream and bon-bons."

But Hetty was not listening, or rather she was listening intently to some footsteps that were coming along the street. The door was reached, but still the steps went on.

"Why don't Ned Parker come?" said May at last. "It is very strange, for he told me it would be awfully jolly, and he wouldn't miss it for anything."

A shout from the next room announced that the boiling had reached its final projection, and the pans were carried in triumphal procession out to the little bench in the moon-lighted yard. Some scouts, chiefly

boys, volunteered to stay out and watch it, with one or two of the cooks, carefully wrapped in hood and shawl by prudent Mrs. Norris.

But most of the party preferred to stay in that delightful kitchen, putting the candles on the high mantelshelf, and sitting in a circle round the fire, while Nan told the stories for which she was famous, and Nora Blake asked riddles that nobody could guess. How many times that candy was tested with a stick by the out-door party—"spell test with an a," said Nora Blake—how many times the story was interrupted by beseeching calls from the watchers, "Do come out and try it *now*," when there would be a rush from the kitchen, and grave consultation over it, all of us know who have watched and waited for candy to grow cool.

At last it was done. It was carried into the kitchen, it was cracked and distributed—and no Ned Parker all this time. "Before it entirely disappears I'll put him by some on a plate," said hospitable Nan, seizing a goodly wedge.

"He don't deserve any," sneered May. "But he may have lost his way in this strange neighbourhood."

Hetty's eyes sparkled, but she did not tell May that already she had noticed the young gentleman leisurely making his way to the railroad depot, and looking up carefully at every window of the Norris house, three several times at least in this strange neighbourhood.

The candy was eaten, the white aprons were rolled up, and the gay party went their several ways. The candy was delicious, but the fun, after all, had been in the making ready. That had lasted all the evening, whereas the candy was all gone in fifteen minutes, all but Ned Parker's piece, which May Jamieson carried home with her—and ate.





CHAPTER XII.

TONY.

AND where *was* Ned Parker all the evening?

Ned had spent hours on that queer wooden spoon, thinking how jolly it would be to make his best bow to Miss Hetty Norris with the spoon over his shoulder. He was polishing the bowl with a bit of sandpaper, flattering himself that he had kept it beautifully white and clean, when his brother, the young doctor, put his head in at the door.

Ned's room was a very museum of stuffed owls, cricket bats, boxing gloves, that had come down to him from his elder brothers, and fishing tackle that he had manufactured for himself. From the midst of his chips he looked up at John's entrance.

"Ned, I thought you would want to hear about Tony. He is sinking very fast, I think."

Ned's heart sank too, as he dropped the spoon.

Tony had been drooping for a few days, and in the excitement since the last "Busy Bee" Ned had not found much time for the hospital.

"Isn't it sudden, John? I had no idea there was anything serious."

"You know," said the young doctor, with his hand on the latch, "I always told you his disease would take a sharp turn some day and carry him off. Now it's come."

"I'll come over right away," said Ned, brushing the chips and sand from his trousers.

"Tell mother, then, not to be worried if you stay with me all night. I suppose you would like to be with him to the end," said Dr. John abruptly, but not unkindly.

"All night! to the end!" Ned gave a rueful glance at the spoon. There is no time to take it all the way up to the Norrises, for John's manner means haste, that is evident.

"I'll write a card to go with this thing, and come right over."

But as he wrote, "Perhaps, after all, John is mistaken. Tony has got through many a hard pull. I will sit with him a while and, if he goes to sleep,

perhaps I can run up to the Norrises for an hour or two. I'll leave this spoon and message with May Jamieson. She need not know where I am going. I'll just tell her to say I can't come early, but hope to be with them before the evening is over."

Poor Ned! Before the evening was over he was deep in another and a very different scene. Tony's little couch had been moved out of the long ward into a smaller room adjoining, that the other little folks might be spared the sight of his suffering. Ned, coming in at the door, in his usual cheery way, was shocked at the change in his little darling. Tony's breath came with gasps, and at long intervals. He was propped up with pillows, and his large blue eyes were anxiously watching the opening door.

"Dear little man," said Ned, coming up to him, and taking the tiny hand that lay helpless on the white coverlet.

He had been about to speak some gay words, "Come, come, Tony, what's all this? You must hurry and get well, and we'll have another base-ball match before long," but he could not speak them; it would have been mockery now. He took a chair by the bedside, and laid his face softly on the little hand

to hide the tears in his eyes. Going! Yes Tony was going fast, very fast.

"Does he know, I wonder? Did Dr. Parker tell him?" he whispered to the nurse.

"No," said the tall woman in a widow's cap, who had kept such a motherly watch over the little patient. "He left it for you to do, if you could; but there is no need, if you think it would pain him."

No need, indeed! His home here had been harsh and unkindly; he had no home outside these walls; but the other world that seemed to throb so distinctly near was surely full of blessed peace and rest. The dear little spirit had known only rack and ache in this rude world; it was comfort to feel that release was near.

"It may frighten him," thought Ned, "to tell him He need never know it—till it comes."

A year before, Ned had had to part with a dear friend, a boy of his own age. He remembered every word, every moment of that parting. How Arthur had held his hand in his own thin fingers, and had whispered with his failing breath, "Ned, it seems almost strange to me now, to think how I used to be afraid to die. I used to think it would be so hard,

and it seems so easy now, easier than to live. I have such beautiful dreams, and when I waken up again, and find I am here still, I long to be gone."

The memory of that parting was with Ned now; and it gave him an added feeling of comfort for Tony; a sort of home feeling for the child, to remember that Arthur, the well-beloved, had gone before.

With a sudden inspiration, lifting his head, and seeing Tony's shining eyes watching him, he said—

"Dear Tony, you will soon be well."

"Soon?" asked the child in a whisper.

"Yes, Tony dear, very soon," putting his hand on the fluttering breast. "Does it hurt you, Tony, here?"

"Pretty bad," sobbed the child.

"It won't hurt any more, Tony; and then you will go to sleep, and never have another pain."

"Shall we go to the fields then?" asked the child, for Ned had given him some golden afternoons since that first day at the base-ball grounds.

"Yes," said Ned quickly, "to the most beautiful fields, where there are roses—oh, such lots of roses!" —Tony's eyes turned towards the window, where a rose-tree was blooming in a china jar—"and where

the birds sing all day long. There is a river there, Tony, with boats going up and down. And the little squirrels run about in the tree-tops, and the grass is very soft for tired boys. But you won't be tired then, Tony, and" ——

"Will you take me there?" asked the child.

"Yes," said Ned thoughtfully, almost hesitatingly, swallowing a great sob, "I will go with you there."

"To-morrow shall we go?" asked the child, shutting his eyes, while a happy look came over his face.

"We will see," said Ned, again hiding his face on the white counterpane.

"Good Ned!" said the child very softly and slowly, "I will go to sleep quick—so that to-morrow will hurry and come."

Soothed by Ned's quiet touch on his worn little fingers, comforted to feel that strong, dear friend was near, little Tony fell asleep.

"What a blessed waking the good God must have for such as he!" said the tearful nurse, as Ned gently released the little hand. "Look at the smile on his face still!"

But Ned could not stay, could not look. He hastened with full heart out into the quiet moonlight.

All that he had done for Tony, from that first hopeless morning in the cellar, when the child moaned all the time, and shrank back from Ned's touch as though he feared a blow, to the few bright weeks of hope and comfort the little fellow had had in the hospital, came before him. It seemed so little now to have carried Tony in his arms to the ball play, and given up his own good game, to have devised play-things for the long morning hours. How glad he was for that rose-tree! Ned had asked Madam Jamieson to send it from her green-house. It had not been easy to ask—but how little it all seemed now!

“Did he miss me, I wonder, yesterday? I was so busy over that spoon!” The spoon, the candy-party—they seemed a hundred miles off somehow. The sky, bending low, with its throbbing stars, seemed infinitely nearer now.

Nine o'clock struck from the tall church-tower. Ned started. Only nine? He had thought it was past midnight, so full had been those few short hours.

He went back into his brother's office. His face was troubled. He asked an anxious question.

"It was not wrong, John, to tell the little chap about 'Sunny Hill,' was it?"

"About 'Sunny Hill?' Did you tell him where it was?"

"I did not tell him *what* it was; but I talked to him about the river and the trees, and that it was a beautiful field where we would take him soon."

"It pleased him?"

"Yes, he went quietly to sleep, to make the time come soon when we should go there—he and I—was it wrong in me?"

"I trust not, Ned—you wished to soothe the child. And we will take him there—we will lay him there."

And in "Sunny Hill," the beautiful field by the river, where the sleepers are many, old and young, they laid little Tony to rest. The roses were all done blooming, and the snow fell on the little grave; but when Ned walked out there, before many days, and saw the sparkling blue sky shine through the tree-tops—so near the sky seemed there—and the

pinetrees were so green and bright beneath their burden of glistening snow, and the sun shone so warmly and lovingly on all around, he hoped that he had kept faith with Tony.





CHAPTER XIII.

FAIRINGS AND FAIR INNINGS.

THE great day of the Fair came at last. The one large hall, the town-hall, that had been used for anti-slavery meetings in the bad old times, and for the Sanitary Fair in the blessed new; that had heard Frenchwomen plead for suffering France, and swarthy men ask help for Cuba; that had sent our supplies to burnt Chicago, was thrown open now to the "Busy Bees."

Christmas fell on a Saturday this year, and this was the Tuesday before. In the hall all was confusion. Tables were being spread with white cloths; energetic boys were at work covering some of them with sheets of fair white paper, and making little terraces and pyramids of piled-up boxes, the better to display the fancy wares. Flags were hung, mirrors, large and small, were sent down on hand-barrows, and there

was a perfect stream of messengers, with packages and baskets, all day long.

Delia Doran had gone backwards and forwards, aided by Bobby, with a large clothes basket, and Nan, with a scarlet handkerchief, one of grandfather's old bandanas, tied round her head, and her sleeves pinned back, was busy at work behind her table. Hetty could not come down till afternoon, but her holidays commenced then, and she could have a free evening for the Fair, which was to open formally at six o'clock.

But to understand the mysteries of the Norris table, we must go back to that far-away September day, when the invitation was given to join the Busy Bees. On the next afternoon Hetty, with one of her little brothers, both carrying baskets, had gone over to the depot just in time to catch the half-past three train. They passed several stations, but when the conductor called out "Springwood," out jumped Miss Hetty and Bob. They crossed a wooden bridge and climbed a steep hill that rises from the road, following the course of the stream. Presently the path struck directly into a deep wood, and she and Bob were lost to sight. If we had followed them,

which we shall not, we should have seen Hetty on her knees, quickly and carefully digging up root after root of maiden-hair and the climbing fern, with clusters of ground ivy, while Bob was busy gathering handfuls of the greenest of velvet moss, and scraping off the tiny red cups of the gray old lichens that grew at the roots of the trees.

Their baskets were heavy enough when the return-train came by, but they managed to get down the hill in time to catch it; and father met them at the depot and helped Hetty with her load.

Then Miss Hetty went out mysteriously that very night, leaning on her father's arm, to a rough shop in the market street. It was a shop much frequented by the country people on their way from market; and a great variety of wooden ware and farm implements was displayed in the doorway. Hetty bought a tall stack of wooden bowls, shallow bowls of different sizes, and some ox-muzzles also, made of steel wire. These were sent home, and carried to the front attic. In these shallow bowls of clean white wood, and in these rude ox-muzzles, Hetty carefully arranged the ferns, the moss, and the graceful vines she had brought from Springwood. Every day she tended

her little colony, moving some of them into the broad sunlight of the one window, and setting others in a large tub in the darkest corner of the room, tending them as though they were so many babies, as Nan said. Indeed, if all babies were as carefully watched and trained, it would be very well for the world. This was Hetty's fairing.

Nan's work lay on the rough pine table that had been carried up from the kitchen—work that went on from morning till night at every spare minute. "The most beautiful paper-dolls in the world," said Hetty admiringly, and so they were, at least in that part of the world that Hetty knew. Nothing like them had ever been seen in B. at least. They were cut out of card-board, tall, fine dolls, whole families of them,—mothers and daughters, and little boys in knickerbockers.

"I won't make any men," Nan decided. "Their black clothes are so stiff and ugly."

The faces were exquisitely drawn and tinted, with a soft colour in the cheeks. There were blue-eyed blondes, with golden hair in soft, fluffy curls; there were brunettes with rich, dark hair, in wavy bands; there were Kenwig braids, like Hetty's own, though

we will have to call them *Marguerites*, now that she has grown so tall.

There was a stately old lady, with bright, gray hair rolled back from her face, looking like a duchess, in her black velvet gown; and another, still older, with darling gray puffs, that was the very picture of a dear grandmother I know.

As for the dresses, Nan fairly revelled over them. All the beautiful things she had ever wanted to wear, all the pretty costumes she had read or dreamed of, she put on those small dolls. As she could not carry them out in velvet and silk, she put her fancies into cut lace and tissue paper. There were soft white muslin dresses for summer, with knots of blue or violet ribbon, there were striped muslins with little rosebuds, gorgeous Roman sashes, black velvet for the knickerbockers and the dowagers, and fresh street-suits in lavender and pearl-gray for the young girls.

They were really too pretty to part with. Hetty declared she would like nothing better than to play with them all day long; especially when Nan added large painted fans, cunning little hats, and a chate-laine with *vinaigrette*, to the wardrobes. Last of all,

and to take care of the younger children, Nan had made a *bonne*, in a cap and white apron, with a silver watch in her belt. And a very pretty, smiling, rosy-cheeked nurse she was, as though she could never say a cross word, nor give a jerk and a shake to any little child in *her* care.

These, then, were the mysterious preparations; and great was the crowd around the Norris table on that first evening. The paper-dolls "went," as Nora Blake said they would, "like hot cakes;" and as she was at the head of the cake-table, she was supposed to know.

She had carried her point on the pie question, and, candour compels me to state, there was a crowd around her table too. Whenever was there a boy who could not eat pie at any hour of the day or night? Cranberry tarts of ruby richness, golden slices of pumpkin and lemon puddings, while the delicious, fragrant mince-meat hid beneath its upper crust, and a sprinkle of glistening sugar on top.

"It is very unhygienic, I know," laughed Miss Brown, who was there in the midst of her flock, "and I suppose we would be all the better for eating

oatmeal porridge instead, but then it is very good; and we may eat oatmeal porridge all the rest of the year."

Nan had put a very modest price on her pretty paper-dolls, "not half enough," some good judges said; and the children complained they could scarce get a sight of the dollies,—the table was so surrounded by mothers and aunties picking off the prettiest ones before the curious little Christmas spies could see them.

Hetty's bowls and hanging baskets, arranged in a pyramid from the centre of the table, were the success of the evening, as far as decoration went. It was a great comfort to the young gentlemen, strolling round in despair among the sofa-cushions and slippers, to catch sight of the fresh green ferns and graceful vines, with the sweet face behind them, that could name each individual leaf and spray.

The crowning bowl of all was overflowing with delicate smilax, which had not come out of the woods, but had been sent in a box from Philadelphia.

Hetty was very proud of it, for it was a perfect success, and exquisitely graceful; and she had settled it in her mind where she wanted it to go. When she

was building up her bank of green, at five o'clock in the afternoon, she hesitated.

"Shall I keep it back till the others are sold? I can't do that, and yet I know it will go the first thing, and I shall be so sorry if any one else gets it."

Two or three times she took it down, and put it under the table, in a cool tin box she had placed there to freshen up any drooping darlings; and as often she took it out again, and put it desperately at the very crown of all.

Fortunately Nan was too busy with her numerous small families to see her, or she would have been called to account for this undecided and strange behaviour. She walked off a few paces, and was dolefully admiring the effect, noticing how the smilax outshone every other cluster, when a voice in her ear said,—

"Won't take your time now, Miss Hetty, but will you promise to keep the very prettiest thing on your table for me—that is—for my mother? I will let you choose it for me."

So now Hetty, with a sigh of relief, and a clear conscience, could slip a small card, marked "sold,"

under the smilax leaves, and wait events with due calmness.

The great stroke of the evening and the success was also a device of Nan's, though she had given the execution of it into other hands.

Leonard, coaxed out of his shyness, and into a brown morning-jacket of his father's, had actually been busy in the hall all day, hanging wires from one end of the room to the other. A green, mysterious curtain hid his other preparations, but quite across the hall from him was the post-office tent. In this Miss Newby took her seat, as the clock struck seven.

The tent was crowded all the evening, and as the messages came by telegraph, and one could hear them clicking off before one's very eyes, it was truly charmin . Leonard was kept busy by enterprising girls and energetic boys, sending messages to and fro, and Nan had previously supplied him with scraps of bright nonsense, to keep the wires busy.

There were some disappointed hearts. May Jamieson's for one. That young lady had taken her place behind her really very pretty and well-filled table,

expecting to be the attraction of the evening. It is always the way. The girls who had gone there full of themselves and their own looks did not enjoy it at all, for in the general crush and confusion what did it matter if one wore double or single ruffles, or had one's hair dressed "high" or "low?"

Nora Blake—a whole-souled girl, whose only fault was in saying everything that came into her head, and having to be very sorry for it afterwards—and all those girls who were full of the business of the evening, had a glorious time up to the very last tired minute.

May's "*Bon Voyage*," which was really very pretty, but which she had valued at three times its worth, hung up disconsolately until eleven o'clock, when, just before the hall closed, Dr. Parker, dragged there by Ned, came up and bought it for his mother.

But if May was disappointed, Madam Janieson, who walked through the rooms at nine o'clock, was gayest of the gay. A very pretty little sonnet, addressed to the Queen of the Bees, had been telegraphed to her as soon as she entered the room. Madam was delighted; and a busy bird—not bee—

having whispered to her that the sonnet had come from behind the mysterious curtain, she had sent a message asking Leonard to come to her.

"Do come, Leonard, she is such a dear old lady, and she does so want to see you."

But Leonard hung back. He was so used to the dingy back shop, and the society of his books and strange machines, that to walk down that hall in the broad glare of the chandeliers was a great ordeal. But what would he not do for Nan, who had been sent to fetch him?

"You look very well indeed, Leonard," as he shyly glanced down at his coat and feet.

But it was not dress the poor fellow was thinking of—she knew that—he still shrank from the curious glances that always followed his deformed figure. But Nan also knew that Leonard lived too much with these brooding fancies; that it was good for him to make an effort and mingle with other people; it was hardly manly so to shut himself up; and he had a manly soul.

So she put her arm in his, and the prettiest girl in the room walked protectingly down the long hall with him. People were kinder than he thought, or

better bred; only a few seemed to see him at all, and to recognise him with a hasty nod, and turn to other things.

Madam Jamieson made him sit down by her, and talked, in the way she knew so well, of just what would please him best. She had known his mother—had met her in Europe years before as a gay young bride: “Nineteen—twenty years ago, was it? I am growing old, you see! She was a very beautiful woman, with a Madonna face—you remember her, do you not?”

Leonard, drawn into talk of this dear, dead mother, who was a faint, radiant dream of his boyhood, rather than a recollection, answered and listened. From this, and pleasant talk about his father’s new picture, and his own work in the back shop, she gracefully hinted her thanks to him for the pretty sonnet; and as he stammered something in reply the watchful Nan came up, and carried him off again to see the tables and eat some cream.

Three boys had followed Leonard on his way down the room, but had not dared to provoke the wrath of the all-powerful Nan. They stood in a little circle near the sofa on which Madam Jamieson and Leonard

sat, and had laughed and joked a good deal, in a loud, ugly way.

But Nan, after she had made the tour of the room with Leonard, and brought him to admire Hetty's ferns, was caught by a customer and detained over her own paper-dolls; so that Leonard, lingering a few moments longer, turned to go back to his own den. Indeed, behind the mysterious green curtain the little instrument had been clicking for some time, with nobody to heed it.

Three boys crossed the room and walked close behind him, mimicking his gait, and bending themselves almost double to imitate his misshapen figure. A little titter went up from behind some of the tables, when Ned Parker, who was walking with Hetty, caught the sound and saw the movement.

In an instant he sprang upon the group. Two of the boys slunk away in affright; but the tallest and oldest, a rude fellow named Morgan, made himself into a still more hideous knot, and shuffled along behind Leonard, who did not turn his head.

Ned seized Morgan by the collar.

"Come, stop that!" he said in a low, threatening voice.

"You let me alone, will you?" growled Morgan, still hunching his shoulders, and breaking into a jeering laugh.

In a twinkling Ned knocked him down.

The suddenness of the blow, for Ned had flung himself on him with all his force, stunned Morgan for a minute. The next, he was on his feet again, and made for Ned like a mad bull, his face purple with rage, and his eyes staring wildly. Ned confronted him with a flushed face and sparkling eyes.

"If you want to fight, come out into the street and I'll thrash you. You don't want to let the girls see you whipped!"

It was not a very wise speech, and Ned apologised for it afterwards to Hetty. The other girls who stood near retreated in dismay behind their tables, or stood up on benches and screamed, and the boys formed a ring in evident glee.

But Ned, coming to himself in another minute, broke through the ring. It was just in time, for Madam Jamieson was walking quickly towards them, and Nan had left her table and stood beside Leonard, who had turned, and with dilated eyes was watching the scene.

Morgan still stood with doubled fists, glaring after Ned, who, bowing to Madam Jamieson as he passed her, made his way slowly down the long room to the door. There he turned and leaned against a pillar, with a careless air, still keeping his eye on Morgan.

Mrs. Jamieson put her hand on Morgan's shoulder when she came up to him, but he ducked and escaped her, walking with assumed indifference towards the *other* door! Whether he meant to meet Ned outside and fight it out, or intended to slink secretly away, there was no chance to see.

For Nan pounced on him as he went by, seizing his arm; he could not escape her!

"Come this minute and ask Mr. Arnold's pardon!" she said, and the look in her eyes made Morgan wince.

"You *are* a gentleman, aren't you? And you've done a mean thing! Come this minute and say you are sorry!"

Whether the "sorry" on such prompt demand was very genuine is matter for conjecture; but Morgan suffered himself to be overborne by the impetuous young lady, and stood before Leonard looking very

sheepish, and muttering some incoherent words that passed for apology.

Leonard held out his hand and said a few pleasant words, while his sad eyes turned from the boy's discomfited face to Nan's all aglow with excitement.

"It was well Billy Morgan gave in when he did," said Tommy Bell afterwards, "for Nan came down on him like lightning. Didn't her eyes blaze though! I tell you she'd have given *him* something to remember if he'd held out a minute longer!"

Leonard went back behind the curtain, and the next minute a Christian message came over the wires, "*Peace on earth and goodwill among men!*" Sent by Miss Newby from table to table, it was needed to bring them all back to the memory of the blessed Christmas time, which they had come so near to forgetting in the rivalries and vanities and passion of the hour.

Morgan took refuge at the refreshment table, and tried to atone for his misconduct by eating enormous wedges of pie for the good of the hospital, if not his own; while Ned, sauntering slowly up the long room, rejoined Hetty again.

"I ought to ask pardon, I know, Miss Hetty, for fighting before you; and I wish it had been anywhere else. But what is a fellow to do? You are not angry with me, are you? You will walk with me?"

Angry! Hetty was never farther from it in her life. In her heart of hearts she was very proud—proud to know such a champion; to have him walk down the room beside her, and order her ice-cream.

She had stood with her hands clasped tight before her through all the fray; she had not screamed nor run as did the others; and though she could not for her life have pounced upon Morgan as Nan did, nor indeed touched him with her finger-tip, she gloried secretly in Ned's telling blow.

They passed by Morgan at the refreshment table. Ned gave him a careless nod, that might mean anything you choose. Hetty interpreted it, "You are safe this time, but let me catch you at it again!" and perhaps Morgan did so too.





CHAPTER XIV.

WOULD YOU SEND ONE TO A GIRL?

"WHAT do you think Ned Parker told me last night?" asked Hetty.

The sisters were enjoying a delicious lounge; it was holiday time, and everything was serene in and about the house.

Mrs. Norris had let them sleep late that morning; and coming downstairs they found two foaming cups of chocolate standing hot by the fire—chocolate that their souls rejoiced in, with toast browning on the fork.

So they sipped their breakfast leisurely, taking all the good there was in that calm, unhurried morning. They had the room to themselves, for Mrs. Norris had taken the boys down street to see Santa Claus, and to buy presents for every member of the family with their long-saved pennies. Delia was at work

upstairs, and John Norris had gone down to Leonard's, as he always did now in the morning, whether Nan went or not.

"I am prepared for anything," said Nan, in mock heroics. "Pour thy soul into mine, sweet sister."

"Don't tease, Nan; it is only about our candy party. Coming home last night"——

"You didn't run away last night for fear he would want to wait on you home?"

"No, indeed. I was only too glad to have him come home with us. But do listen, Nan. He never got the candy we sent him by May Jamieson!"

"Possible?" said Nan. "Then she ate it up herself!"

"‘There was only one thing, Miss Hetty,’ Ned said, ‘that I missed from your table to-night.’ You know he got the smilax, and Madam Jamieson took it home in her carriage for him."

"Well, what else did he want? What did he miss from our table?"

"Maple candy. ‘You know,’ he said ‘that I couldn't come the night you made it, and I was in hopes you would have some on the table, just for me to taste and give my opinion of it.’"

"‘But we sent you some,’ I said, ‘by May Jamieson, that very night. Didn’t you get it?’"

"‘Never saw a bit of it!’"

"‘Nan put it up for you in white paper, like wedding cake, and wrote your name on it. There couldn’t be any mistake about it, for May said she would see you the very next day!’"

"‘So she did,’ said Ned, looking very sober. I don’t know whether he was thinking about that dear little Tony, who died then, you know, or whether it was about May. For he began right away to talk about something else. Now what do you think?’"

"Think!" said Nan, "*I know!* Of course she ate it. Of all meanness! I’ll ask her whether she enjoyed it next time I see her. She with such lots of everything she wants, boxes and boxes from Whitman’s all the time! At her age too! Why, even Bob wouldn’t have done it!"

"Now, Nan, don’t say anything about it; promise me, for I must tell you the rest. Just before we came to our steps, and while father and you were getting the door open, Ned asked me to please not say anything about it, not even to May; not to ask her anything, but just to pass it over. He did not say why,

for we came up the steps just then; but I know it is because he likes Madam Jamieson so much, he don't want her ever to hear it."

"Well, if you have promised, why do you tell me?"

"Oh, I said to him, 'I must tell Nan, but she is safe.'"

"Safe? Humph! Well, I suppose I'll have to be. But I would like to have seen May's face when I called her to account."

"He shall have his candy, at all events," said Hetty. "I'll make him some this very day. Where is the maple sugar?"

So there was another candy-boiling on a smaller scale, and it turned out splendidly. Hetty got down one of the India china plates,—six of them, they had on a sacred upper shelf; and Nan broke up the candy into dainty blocks. A card was written in Hetty's neatest hand,—

"Edward Parker, No. 12 Magnolia Square." Everything else must wait until that candy was sent.

"Eleven o'clock. I wonder if Delia could take it?"

"Oh, yes, she can. I will finish sweeping our

room, tell her," said Nan, who entered heartily into the whole plan.

Delia, delighted at the prospect of a mid-day walk in the fashionable square, made ready in a twinkling, and went out of the door in triumph, bearing high the plate, covered with a damask napkin.

In three minutes there was a ring at the bell.

"She has broken it! I knew she would," cried Hetty. "Oh! why did we trust her with it!"

Nan rushed to the door, and admitted—not Delia, but Belle and Fanny Black, come to talk over the glories of the fair.

"Candy! How good!" said they both, sniffing the air. "We are lucky!"

"Very sorry," said Nan, with a backward glance at the kitchen, which Hetty was hurriedly putting to rights; "but it is all gone, every bit."

"Yes," said Fanny, looking very full of mischief, "and we know *where* it's gone. We met your Delia just now, and stopped to ask if you were at home, and we couldn't help seeing the card in her hand. We asked her who had made it, and she said Hetty had."

Hetty stood in the back room and stamped her foot

in vexation. "Why didn't we leave it till evening? Delia will meet everybody and let them all read the card!"

"Well, that is a thing *I* never did," said Belle, drawing herself up, "send a present to a boy! I wouldn't do it for the world!"

"Would you send one to a girl?" asked Miss Hetty, coming suddenly into the parlour.

"O Hetty! How queer you are! Of course I would!"

"So would I—if I liked her; and I do like Ned Parker. If he was a girl, now, you wouldn't say a word; but just because he happens to be a boy you shy off from him as if he was a snake! I hate hypocrisy!"

"Why, Hetty, do you mean me by hypocrisy?"

Hetty did not answer; and Nan, coming to the rescue, said, "Well, I am sure the girls were all very proud to know Ned Parker last night, and to walk with him. I think he is splendid, and I am very glad we know him. I hope he will come to see us often, just as often as if he was a girl!"

"But then, you know, people will talk so; it looks

as if you were running after him, don't it?" persisted Fan.

"Bother! Let them talk. *He* won't think so, at any rate!" and Fanny prudently dropped the subject. But Hetty was still immensely indignant; and as Mrs. Norris came in just then, she determined to talk it out before the girls.

"Mother, we did not wait to ask you, but we have just made some candy, and sent it to Ned Parker; he was not here the night of the party, you know."

Here Hetty stopped. She could not speak it out before Belle and Fanny, the real reason of the hurried candy-making.

"Well," said Mrs. Norris, taking off her bonnet, "I hope it was good. Was it burnt, or what was the matter with it?" laughing at Hetty's injured expression.

"No, the candy was all right; but the girls here think it wasn't just right to send it to him, because—he—is a boy!"

If the girls had not been there Hetty would have cried outright. She just saved herself, as it was, by coming to a full stop.

"That is a very good reason for sending it to him, I think," said Mrs. Norris, seeing the whole discussion at a glance; "for I don't suppose he could ever make any for himself. *I* should like to send him something—a vote of candy or thanks, for his splendid behaviour last evening. I do not believe Morgan will ever dare to mock Leonard again."

So Mrs. Norris skilfully changed the subject; and the Norris girls had full permission, Belle and Fanny reported, to be as intimate with Ned Parker as they liked.

"You darling marmsey!" said Nan, as the door shut upon their visitors, "you do know just how a girl feels—only it seems so hard for some girls to be sensible upon the subject of boys—and you don't sit in judgment upon us, like some mothers. And you did just take those girls right off their feet! We never *could* do anything you would not like, for we would know it by instinct beforehand."

"We never thought of waiting, mother, to ask you," said Hetty, with her head in her mother's lap.

"There was no need, my dears. Whenever you don't *think* of waiting to ask me, you may be sure it is all right, though all mothers may not be safe to tell their daughters this."

"Well, I do want to ask you something," said Nan, "and I believe I have been waiting too. Can't we invite Leonard and his father here for Christmas? They must have a doleful one at home, with only old Beulah."

"I was thinking of that this morning," said Mrs. Norris; "it would please your father, I know."

"We will have them, then, and I would like to ask Miss Newby too, if you think it would not be crowding. It seems all *my* party," said Nan, interrupting herself.

"You deserve it, you dear old thing, I am sure," said Hetty. "If I had had my way, I should have gone poking along all winter; never have joined the Busy Bees, nor had any fun at all—I was so stupid! It seemed to me there was nothing but to work, work, straight on, and no room to play in. But Nan can do both. We should never have gone near the Fair at all if we had not been with the Bees; we should have been afraid to go. And think, mother,

our table made sixty dollars—clear *made*, besides what the bowls and baskets cost.”

“And we never should have known Ned Parker either,” said honest Nan.

When John Norris came home to dinner his wife said to him, “Shall we invite the Arnolds and Miss Newby to spend Christmas with us, John?”

“For Christmas?” he said. “Oh, I have done it already; that is, I asked Leonard to come. I never thought of his father.”

The girls looked at each other. To have their father talk thus, to have him do anything, think of anything, except his own wearying troubles, was like turning a long-forgotten leaf. And he looked so cheerful too, to-day; really more like his own self than at any time since his illness.

They laughed at him for thinking only of Leonard; but in their hearts they rejoiced that he had, of his own thought, given even the half invitation for Christmas day.

“Well, I’ll make it all right this afternoon,” he said in answer to the laugh; “I told Leonard I would come down there again.”

The girls had not noticed, and perhaps their mother

herself had not taken note of it, but there was a great change come over John Norris. His step was firmer; his head no longer drooped heavily forward; and his whole face lighted up at times with something of its old purpose. When he was alone with Leonard the change was even more marked. In those long mornings together his old, resolute manner, that had seemed gone forever, came back at times as he talked.

He took his cane now, when they rose from the table.

"You are in a great hurry, father; shall I walk down with you?" asked Nan.

"No, no, my dear; best go over to Miss Newby. She will be expecting you, and—give her her invitation."

"I really wanted to see Leonard," said Nan, as her father walked away from the door.

He did not need any one's help now; the streets that he had to cross were all familiar; every one knew him, and had a pleasant word of greeting as he passed.

"I wonder how Leonard feels when he thinks of Morgan? He would be a saint to forgive him, and

yet he *seemed* to. And that Christmas message! Wasn't it lovely in him to think of that? I wish father had wanted me. I feel as if I was shut out from going there to-day."





CHAPTER XV.

CHRISTMAS FIRELIGHT.

NAN consoled herself with a visit to Miss Newby, who said she would gladly come on Christmas Day, if she could get leave to close the office for a few hours.

"Poor Emma! She looked so thin and worn! I wonder if I will look that way," said Nan, surveying herself in the glass in her own room that night. 'Hetty thinks her work is stupid. I wonder what she would say to 'rat-tat-scratch-snap' all day long?'"

Miss Newby walked in on Christmas Eve to say that she would be able to come the next day—the night-operator had agreed to take her place for the afternoon.

Hetty and Nan were busy upstairs with the children's stockings, and Mrs. Norris was sitting all alone by the fire in a pleasant reverie.

Her husband—what had come over him of late—was spending the evening with the Arnolds, and Leonard had promised to bring him home.

It was not often you had a chance to find Mrs. Norris alone; either her girls or her boys were always, as Nan said, “swarming over her.”

Miss Newby delivered her message, and still stood by the fire as if hesitating whether to stay or go. Mrs. Norris, though she had promised herself a quiet hour of rest and comfort, was touched by the girl's manner, and said kindly,—

“Will you stay with me a little while now and rest? You look tired. I am afraid you are working too hard.”

“It is not too intruding, is it, to want to stay? Dear Mrs. Norris, if you only knew how delightful it is to come into a home once more!”

And the girl dropped into a low seat beside Mrs. Norris, and held out her hands to the blaze.

“My dear child! I never thought to ask Nan. Why have you not come to us before? Have you not been with friends,—haven't you comfortable quarters?”

“Four walls,” said the girl her eyes filling with

tears. "I have so often looked in at this window, going past at dusk, and longed to come in."

"Why didn't you? Nan would have been only too glad; but I believe she stands almost in awe of you, as a very distinguished young lady, indeed."

Nan had, in fact, looked up to Miss Newby as a successful, enterprising girl, who could take care of herself perfectly, and could need nothing at their hands. She had only known her in her quick business ways at the office, and her salary was a little fortune in Nan's eyes. What could she possibly need of the struggling Norrises?

"Perhaps I feel lonelier than ever to-night, because I am going away. Yes, dear Mrs. Norris, only don't tell Nan till I see her to-morrow. I have a reason for it. I am going out to Colorado to be married. We did talk of waiting till June, but William has a good place now on the railroad, and I shall go out to him on New Year's Day."

"Can I help you any, my dear, to make ready?"

Miss Newby took the kind motherly hand in both of hers, and said through her tears, "I wanted so to come over and tell you when William's letter came. It seemed so hard to have nobody to be glad about

it, and say a kind word. When a girl makes her own living, if she hasn't any of her own people to stand by her, other people do stand off,—as if we were machines, I think. I have taken care of myself ever since I was sixteen. Mother died before I came out of the school at Blankbury."

"What school was it? We have friends in Blankbury."

"It was the Soldiers' Orphan School," Miss Newby answered simply.

Mrs. Norris could have cried then. To think of the motherless girl living her own brave life so near them,—and that they had left her so utterly alone!

With a sudden impulse she bent over the girl and kissed her. Then, drawing her head gently into that motherly lap, she stroked the fair, pale hair, saying softly,—

"Will you let me be mother from now till New Year's Day? Stay with us till then!"

"Will you really have me?"

"Indeed I will. You must let us all help you to make ready. You know at such times we old wives live our weddings over again,"

"I have bought all sorts of things; a great deal of rubbish, I dare say; and I suppose the reason I look tired is that I have been sewing a great deal of evenings lately. I had to do something, you know, with my time."

Those blank, dull, boarding-house evenings. Margaret Norris sees them all. The debt she owed to that soldier's daughter sitting lonely there, while her own children gathered round their tranquil hearth! One little week to pay it in, that was all.

"But to think I am really to have a week of home, a real home, before I go! Dear Mrs. Norris, it is a lovely present for Christmas Eve. But I must go now," jumping up, as there came a brisk ring at the bell. "I cannot see any one, can't talk to anybody else to-night."

Miss Newby vanished through the opening door, just as a large box was handed in. It was of pasteboard, directed to Miss Hetty Norris. The expressman shoved it into the doorway and drove rapidly away.

Hetty came down all excitement at her mother's call, followed by Nan on tiptoe.

"It looks like a new bonnet," said she, dancing

round it, while Hetty cut the strings that bound the lid. Opened it disclosed an enormous ball of carpet-rags.

"Ned Parker!" cried Nan. "Well, if he calls that a joke it is a very poor one!"

"There is some catch in it," said Hetty, coming to the rescue. "This blue ribbon means something at the ends. I'll unwind it and see!"

She took hold of the ribbon, and gently unwinding, disclosed an enormous box of bon-bons, which the gay strips of silk and muslin had but barely covered.

They talked round the fire for a long time after that, the mother and her girls, with the box on the table near them, daintily choosing from the rich store of sweetmeats, and planning for the morrow. Father was very late, "and very tired," he said when he came in. Leonard had left him at the door with just a good night. But he seemed to bring the Christmas cheer, as well as the Christmas cold, in with him; and they noticed how light his step was as he went up the stairs.

"Don't go to sleep on the sofa, Nan," said the mother at last. "It is time we were all in bed."

"To think it is only a year,—no, not quite a year," said Nan, sitting up pensively, "since I did go to sleep on the sofa, that black night in Maple Street. Remember, Hetty! when the fire went out and father was so ill; everything was gloomy, and we were all in despair.

"What has happened since then to make us all feel so rich, I wonder? I think it began with coming up here into this blessed little pinched-up place."

"I think it began, a great deal of it," said Mrs. Norris, "with a set of shirts, and a new kind of kindling wood I had for my fire one morning."





CHAPTER XVI.

A STEADY GLOW.

CHRISTMAS dinners are all alike in all well regulated families. Christmas holly round the walls, and the pudding, and the great turkey crowning the feast,—a turkey from Greene county.

“ ‘*He never could have stood upon his legs that bird!*’ ” said Mr. Arnold, as he plunged the knife into the rich brown breast. That blessed Carol! Is there ever a word or a line of it that does not come in sometimes on Christmas Day, like a gracious benediction, for laughter or for tears?

Nan sat between her father and Leonard, and devoted herself dutifully to both. She supplied her father's plate with dainty slices, and rejoiced that Leonard seemed no longer sad and shy. Indeed, there was a manly confidence in his manner that Nan

had never noticed before, and that somewhat puzzled her. Miss Newby and he, across the table, kept up a perfect sparkle of wit between them, while John Norris' face reflected a serene satisfaction, almost the look of old.

Hetty fed children to right and to left of her. She was cutting up slices of turkey, and taking potatoes out of their jackets with cheerful energy, when Mr. Arnold asked her suddenly if she had ever seen the Kaulbach picture of "Lotte cutting bread and butter." Wasn't it a favourite of hers? He admired it very much, he said.

They lingered long over the dessert, for the plum-pudding was of Hetty's compounding, and the bonbons were "Whitman's Best." Then coffee was brought in in the delicate India cups that had been Grandmother Norris' wedding china.

Then Leonard, with a very grave face, handed across the table to Mrs. Norris a mysterious paper, bearing the seal of the United States. It was full of a great many words that nobody could understand; but it was soon explained.

John Norris and Leonard, working day after day in that dingy back shop, two heads and one pair of

skilful hands, had made an Invention! And this was the patent for it! Which made all of them clap their hands.

There was nothing very wonderful about it—the wonder was it had not been thought of years ago. And it was not a mine of gold, nor anything of the sort; but it would be really useful to a great many people, and there would be a small income from it now, which would grow with it every year.

Then Miss Newby, leaning across the table in her turn, put a yellow envelope into Nan's hand. It was stamped in one corner, B. W. & E. R. R., and Nan's face flushed as she took it.

She half-hoped it was from Jim, but this had not come by post.

It, too, was an official document, and it informed Miss Anna Norris of her appointment as day-operator at the telegraph station A. of the road, notifying her to enter upon her duties on the first of January.

How Nan first laughed and then cried on her father's shoulder, how they all cheered and congratulated her, how the talk turned on Colorado, and

Miss Newby's wedding journey, we may tell here and now.

How the "little income," so modestly estimated by Leonard, grew steadily year by year; how the old house in Maple Street came again to be home, more beautiful than ever; how Nan faithfully kept the station A. until the signal came to detach the wires; and how in the dim distance there is an easel, and colours, and a dear copy of a blind face, so pathetic and lovely that it won a golden prize, we may tell some day, but neither now nor here.





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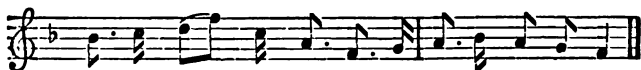
The bon - nie, bon - nie bairn, sits po - kin' in the aae,



Glow'rin' in the fire wi' his wee round face;



Laughin' at the fuf - fin' lowe— what sees he there?



Ha! the young dreamer's biggin' castles in the air.



His wee chubby face, an' his touzle curly pow, Are laughin' an' noddin'



to the dancin' lowe; He'll brown his rosy cheeks, an' singe his sunny hair,



Glow'rin' at the lumps wi' their castles in the air.

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I've seen the snail - ing of fir - tune be - gull - ing, I've
tast - ed her plea - sures and felt her de - cay; Sweet was
her bless - ing and kind her en - com - mend - ing, But now they are
fled, they are fled far a - way. I've seen the fo - rest a -
dorn - ed the fore - most, Wi' flowers o' the fair - est haith pleas - and
and gay, See bon - nie was their blooming, their scent the air per - fum - ing,
But now they are with - er'd and a' wode a - way.

I've seen the morning
With gold the hills adorning,
And loud tempests storming before the mid-day.
I've seen Tweed's silver streams,
Shining in the sunny beams,
Grow drumly and dark as he row'd on his way.

Oh! fickle fortune!
Why this cruel sporting?
Oh! why still perplex us poor sons of a day.
Thy frown canna fear me,
Thy smile canna cheer me,
Since the flowers o' the forest are a' wode away.

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